60 PSS students take part in first CTE & Me event. PAGE 2
Tinian duo tops MTEC Tourism App Challenge. PAGE 4

Hafa Adai!

$1

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Pay hikes, merit awards suspended

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Citing the need to stabilize the fiscal condition of the CNMI government, Gov. Arnold I. Palacios has suspended all within-grade increases and merit awards.

Palacios

In a directive issued Thursday and addressed to all department and activity heads, Palacios said this decision to suspend within-grade increases and merit awards across the

See PAY HIKE on Page 4

Asiana to suspend flights next month

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Asiana Airlines is expected to suspend its flights to the CNMI starting March 4.

The Commonwealth Ports Authority was informed last week that Asiana will be suspending its flights starting on March 4, until further notice. The move is expected to hurt the CNMI's tourism sector, which is still recovering from the COVID-19 devastation, since Korean travelers are the CNMI's primary tourism market for now.

According to CPA chair

See ASIANA on Page 4

DRT's plan to purchase pricey cars questioned

Aldan

DeLeon Guerrero

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Rep. Vincent Seman Aldan (Ind-Saipan) on Friday questioned the Division of Revenue and Taxation's request to

See DRT on Page 4

'TOUCHBACK' COUNTDOWN
Days until 'touchback rule' takes effect on Sept. 30, 2023:
214

PROJECT: Beach Road Repair from Monsignor Guerrero Road Intersection to Micro Beach Road
CONTRACT NO.: NMHC 2023 - 003
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT: DISASTER RECOVERY (CDBG-DR)
COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
ROUTE 33 (BEACH ROAD) IMPROVEMENTS, PHASE II
FEDERAL AID PROJECT NO. CM-NH-0033 (023)
CONTRACT AMOUNT: $19,788,188.00
START DATE: JAN. 3, 2023
COMPLETION DATE: JAN. 2, 2024
GPPC, INC

Beach Road repair work breaks ground

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

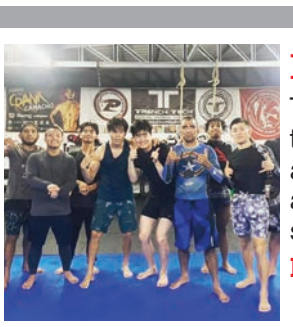
The Northern Marianas Housing Corp.'s Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program and the Department of Public Works, with funding by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of

See REPAIR on Page 4

CNMI OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Gov. Arnold I. Palacios, center, flanked by Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang and Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan (D-MP), along with members of the 23rd CNMI Legislature, and other government officials break ground on the Beach Road project yesterday morning at the Garapan Fishing Base.

INSIDE

LOCAL
CNMI officials join the Consular Office of Japan in celebrating the 63rd birthday of Emperor Naruhito.
PAGE 5



BUSINESS
Trench Tech is giving those on the fence about mixed martial arts a great deal to start the year.
PAGE 11

LIFE & STYLE
"Everything Everywhere All at Once" dominates at the Screen Actors Guild Awards.
PAGE 15

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Local

LEIGH GASES

Sixty students from Tanapag Middle School, ChaCha Ocean View Middle School, Da'ok Academy, Saipan Southern High School, and Kagman High School attend the first ever "Career and Technical Education & Me" event yesterday afternoon at the Northern Marianas Technical Institute campus in Lower Base.

60 PSS students take part in the 1st CTE & Me event

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Northern Marianas Technical Institute, in partnership with the CNMI Public School System, hosted its first ever "Career and Technical Education & Me" event yesterday afternoon at the NMTech campus in Lower Base.

Sixty students from Tanapag Middle School, ChaCha Ocean View Middle School, Da'ok Academy, Saipan Southern High School, and Kagman High School attended the event, along with guest speakers that included acting Labor secretary Leila Staffler, NMTech chief executive officer Jodina Attao, and Education Commissioner Dr. Alfred Ada. Also in attendance was Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan (D-MP).

Not in attendance were Marianas High School students but they already have body and fender automotive courses at NMTech; SSHS and COVMS students are taught woodworking; KHS students are in culinary class; TMS students are taught CORE: Construction; and Da'Ok Academy students are taught construction craft laborer.

Career and Technical Education provides students of all ages with the academic and technical skills, knowledge, and training necessary to succeed in future careers and to become lifelong learners.

Breakout sessions were conducted by chef Zenn Tomokane in the Culinary Arts trade; Gonzalo Pangelinan in the Automotive Technology trade; and Efrain Camacho for the Construction trade.

In Staffler's remarks, she said that PSS is the most important partner of DOL because "you are the future. Everything that we're doing is for you, so that when you graduate, you can come out and take care of us. I thank you in advance for your service and I look forward to seeing who you become."

She touched base on the end of the CW-1 program in 2029 and discussed DOL's efforts in building a sustainable workforce for the CNMI in which they collect data, support workforce development programs by sharing data and leveraging resources, expand on existing programs such as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partnerships, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and skill-up, enhancing workforce protections and opportunities, and implementing regular unemployment programs.

In Attao's remarks, she reiterated the importance of trades in the CNMI. With skilled workers leaving the CNMI in six years, she said the future really are the young students of the CNMI. "It's up to us to build people to replace them. At NMTech, we offer a lot of courses that people can avail of." She said that PSS, DOL, and NMTech are all working as partners to make sure the CNMI has a sustainable workforce.

Ada said, "We want to start building our local capacity at middle school already and we are on track right now." He said he is pleased that young middle school students will get their certifications and are ahead of the curve and that they will meet the workforce needs.

Ada said the event's turnout went well. He said they want children to realize that by 2029, the CW-1 workforce will have to exit and that they would have to be the one to step up.

With the students in attendance yesterday, "I'm very hopeful. I'm very confident. Repetition is how we learn as human beings, so we continue to pitch to them the importance of filling in the gaps in the workforce."

Remarks were also made by Dr. Sam Mabini-Young from Guam Association for Career and Technical Education and Da'Ok Academy senior Nicole Bauleong, who was the first female who signed up for construction courses at NMTech last fall semester. The mistress of ceremony was Dr. Jessica Taylor, PSS CTE director.

Newly restored San Isidro Beach Park restroom now open

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.co
REPORTER

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held Friday morning to unveil the newly renovated and restored public restroom of the San Isidro Beach Park in Chalan Kanoa District 4, popularly known as Laly 4.

Rep. John Paul Sablan (Ind-Saipan) said the ceremony officially opens the public restroom at the San Isidro Beach Park for the people that frequent the area. The renovation/restoration project cost approximately $30,000.

"I'm very happy for this long-awaited project," said Sablan, adding that he and then-representative Christina E. Sablan started the project in the 22nd Legislature by appropriating funding through local delegation.

He said they included three shower heads at the back of the restroom for people that want to rinse off before going home after swimming at the beach.

"I want to congratulate most especially the people that live here at the beach side and thank them for their patience," the lawmaker said.

Sablan said they allocated nearly $30,000 for the project because they had to change all the toilets itself, installed three showerheads, and fixed the piping to the Commonwealth Utilities water meter.

"So there was a lot of facelift there. The building itself had some cracks they had to blaster it and painted it also," he said.

Sablan said they have turned over the facility to the Division of Parks and Recreation, which will be maintaining the facility or is going to be the primary custodian of this public restroom.

For now, because there is no light at the restroom, Parks and Recreation will open the facility only from 6am to 6pm.

Sablan said he and Rep. Manny Castro (Ind-Saipan) look forward into a possible meeting with the Grants Office to look for funding to install solar panels so the restroom could be energized instead of dropping a power line down to the facility.

Sablan said the project was completed after almost a year because there were a lot of things that were not connected at the time when they started it such as piping to the sewer line and to the water meter, and also the facelift of the facility.

Castro thanked Rep. John Paul Sablan and former Rep. Christina Sablan, saying the restroom is going to be really a good amenity for people, residents and tourists alike.

"So we look forward to assisting the Parks and Recreation Division. As times are hard with this government, the recreation side of our community becomes more important so families can enjoy and have a better quality of life," he said.

Saipan Mayor Ramon Blas Camacho said the restroom renovation is long overdue because a lot of people use this property. Camacho said the restroom was nonfunctioning so he thanks Rep. John Paul Sablan and former representative Christina Sablan for working hard to restore the restroom.

"All I'm asking the public is to…use [it] the right way [and] not to vandalize it," the mayor said.

House Speaker Edmund S. Villagomez (Ind-Saipan) and other members of the House majority also attended the ribbon cutting.

House of Representatives Speaker Edmund S. Villagomez, third from right, Rep. John Paul Sablan, sixth from right, and Saipan Mayor Ramon Blas Camacho, fifth from left, lead lawmakers and other officials in the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the newly renovated restroom at the San Isidro Beach Park in Chalan Kanoa, popularly known as Laly 4.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

'Passport service processing times expected to increase'

Beginning Feb. 6, 2023, all passport service processing times are expected to increase with the seasonal rise in applications.

Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan (D-MP) said over the weekend in his e-kilili newsletter that CNMI residents can expect 8 to 11 weeks for routine processing and 5 to 7 weeks for expedited processing of their passport applications. He said these estimates do not include mail delivery service times.

Sablan said the new service commitments apply only to applications executed or signed on or after Feb. 6, 2023.

He said for inquiries and concerns, people may contact his congressional office.

According to the Bureau of Consular Affairs, the processing times begin the day they receive the application at a passport agency or center, not the day it is mailed or applied.

Mailing times may add several weeks on to the door-to-door time it takes to receive a passport. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

NMC-CREES push aquaculture dev't in NMI

Northern Marianas College's Cooperative Research, Extension, and Education Services has completed the first series of community input meetings with the CNMI Aquaculture Producers, regulatory and permitting agencies, resource agencies, business community and stakeholders.

The study is being conducted by the Oceanic Institute of Hawaii Pacific University, which was selected for its extensive knowledge in all aspects of aquaculture and familiarity with the CNMI and Asia-Pacific region. The feasibility study is the first step toward guiding the development of aquaculture in the CNMI. Feedback gathered from the community will be incorporated into the study to help guide the development and content of the document.

The meetings were well attended with over 90% of the invited participants attending. Shaun M. Moss, Ph.D., executive director of Oceanic Institute of Hawaii Pacific University, expressed satisfaction with the outcome.

"Our meetings with community stakeholders [on] Saipan, Tinian, and Rota over the past three days were very productive," Moss said. "Participants provided valuable insights and recommendations which will inform our decisions on how best to design the aquaculture parks with the overall goal to help catalyze the development of a robust and sustainable aquaculture industry here in the CNMI."

Mike Ogo of NMC-CREES' Aquaculture and Natural Resources program expressed his gratitude for the excellent feedback from the stakeholders and how it will be incorporated into the study.

"We are especially thankful for the excellent responses from those present which will help OI formulate the content of the study based on the stakeholder's feedback," Ogo said.

"It was wonderful to have representatives from the private sector, regulatory agencies, higher education, and economic development authorities present at the meetings. We look forward to sharing the results of the study with the community in the summer of 2023," said Patty Coleman, interim dean of NMC-CREES.

The CNMI Aquaculture Feasibility Study is due on June 30, 2023, and is a grassroots study with content driven by the desired species, facilities, farming, or production methods of the stakeholders with the guidance of the Oceanic Institute. NMC looks forward to the completion and submission of the study and hopes it will help catalyze the development of a robust and sustainable aquaculture industry in the CNMI.

"This feasibility study is an important step toward realizing the potential of aquaculture in the CNMI and I am excited to see the valuable feedback provided by the community being incorporated into the study," NMC president Dr. Galvin Deleon Guerrero said. "I am confident that this study will pave the way for the development of a vibrant and sustainable aquaculture industry in the CNMI."

For more information or to get involved with the CNMI Aquaculture Feasibility Study, visit crees.marianas.edu. ***(NMC)***

From left to right, NMC-CREES Aquaculture and Natural Resources Research Assistant I Rovien Maritita, executive director of Oceanic Institute of Hawaii Pacific University Shaun Moss, NMC-CREES Aquaculture and Natural Resources state program leader Michael Ogo, director of Shrimp Department at Oceanic Institute of Hawaii Pacific University Dustin Moss, Latte Marine Services owner and operator Dina Tenorio, Department of Commerce acting director Kioshi Cody, and Saipan Chamber of Commerce executive director Kim C. Camacho

NMC

CNMI DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

PUBLIC NOTICE

The CNMI Department of Commerce, Central Statistics Division is preparing to conduct the CNMI 2023 Prevailing Wage Study (PWS) survey to begin on March 01, 2023 and notifies all businesses and employers in the CNMI to log on to the CSD Data Collection Portal and complete the PWS survey questionnaire.

All businesses and employers (Private & Public), with and with no employees, are urged to complete this survey before March 15, 2023.

Data Collection Portal Link:
http://cnmidata.commerce.gov.mp

Tinian duo tops MTEC Tourism App Challenge

The duo of Sofia Del Rosario and Adriel Lenteja of Tinian Jr./Sr. High bested seven other entries to win the Marianas Tourism Education Council Tourism App Challenge this month.

The contest challenged students to design an app for visitors to the Marianas. The winning entry, "CNMI Eye" was given top marks for originality of the app idea, creativity of the app design, mobile user experience, and demonstration of indigenous cultures, traditions and/or values.

"Me and my partner saw how in the App Store there isn't an app mainly for the CNMI," said Del Rosario in their intro video of the app. "Not many people know about the islands, and we wanted to create an app that can help others learns and share around the world about the Northern Mariana Islands and the history and culture surrounding them."

The app was created with Canva. It requires a sign in and highlights notable sites, hotels, and food on the main page. Search results can be filtered based on preferences. Site pages include location, phone, hours open, reviews, and other information. A user's profile page is customizable and allows users to befriend each other. A navigation map with suggested routes is also included. Fun facts about the Marianas refresh every day, and other suggested websites are also linked.

For their work, team leader Del Rosario will receive $500 for her team. Winning second place and $300 was Roy Dip of Marianas High School for his app, Hafa Adai. Third place and $200 went to team leader Bernadette Fleming and teammate Carrika San Nicholas of Tinian Jr./Sr. High School with their app TravelNTour NMI.

"The MTEC is grateful to all the high school students who participated in the MTEC App Challenge competition," said MTEC acting chair Vicky Benavente. "In their app challenge submissions, these young and talented students showcase the beauty and amenities that are available in the CNMI. Our next step is to move forward with further developing the app and promote travel to the CNMI."

MTEC is a non-profit organization whose mission is three-fold: to foster community understanding and support of the visitor industry; to educate the public, especially school students, about the value, social benefits, and economic contributions made to the community by the visitor industry; and to instill, improve, and promote the "Hafa Ada-Tirow" hospitality spirit throughout the island community. ***(MTEC)***

Former Fire chief repays OT compensation

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Former Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services commissioner Claudio Norita has opted to repay the CNMI government for the allegedly illegal Super Typhoon Yutu premium compensation that he received.

The Office of the Attorney General, though Chief Solicitor J. Robert Glass Jr., has voluntarily dismissed with prejudice its lawsuit in Superior Court against Norita for excessive typhoon overtime pay because Norita has repaid the amount in full.

According to *Saipan Tribune* archives, Manibusan sued Norita for receiving over $45,000 in typhoon premium pay that he should not have been entitled to after Super Typhoon Yutu hits the CNMI in 2018.

As relief, Manibusan asked the court to issue a judgment of $45,042.69 for recovery of the allegedly unlawful typhoon premium payments, overtime payments, or extra payments not authorized by law, without valid appropriation, and in excess of the salary ceiling that Norita allegedly received.

According to the lawsuit, Norita's total compensation in fiscal years 2019 and 2020 exceeded his statutory salary of $54,000, which is against the law.

In total, Norita received typhoon premium pay in the total gross amount of $45,042.69 with $26,890.14 paid in fiscal year 2019 and $18,152.55 paid in fiscal year 2020.

On Dec. 19, 2018, the defendant allegedly received gross wages in the amount of $5,695.41 as typhoon emergency premium pay. Then, on Dec. 21, 2018, Norita allegedly received gross wages in the amount of $3,556.80 as typhoon emergency premium pay. On Dec. 29, 2018, he allegedly received gross wages in the amount of $8,827.08 as typhoon emergency premium pay. Then, on Dec. 31, 2018, he allegedly received gross wages in the amount of $8,810.85 as typhoon emergency premium pay. Finally, on Nov. 8, 2019, Norita allegedly received gross wages in the amount of $18,152.55 as typhoon emergency premium pay.

Norita was the DFEMS commissioner from Oct. 23, 2018, through Jan. 24, 2019.

ASIANA

From page 1

Kimberlyn King-Hinds, although it's unfortunate that they have to suspend flights, they are hopeful that they will come back and continue to provide service between South Korea and Saipan.

"What I understand is that they're going through a bankruptcy so there's a lot of stuff that goes into that discussion. I'm not too familiar, but I'm hoping that they will come back," she said.

Another airline providing air seats from South Korea, T'way Air, is also expected to reduce the number of weekly flights from four times a week to twice a week. However, the airline is expecting to return to daily operations from April 28 to June 1.

Jeju Airlines has also requested approval for additional flights beginning on April 12, according to CPA.

This last month, a total of 56 flights were operated by Jeju Air, T'way Air, and Asiana Airlines from Seoul to Saipan, providing 10,512 air seats to the CNMI.

In February alone, T'way doubled its current four flights a week to eight flights, increasing the total flights for the month to 69 flights, with 12,969 available air seats.

"The doubling of flights by T'way in February is a very good sign of continued interest in the Marianas by South Koreans travelers, coupled with gradual stabilization of the exchange rate that we've battling for several months as a U.S. dollar-based destination," MVA acting board chair Gloria Cavanagh previously said.

Travel agents report almost 80% of the additional February flights were booked.

In March 2023, although the Marianas is expecting to lose twice weekly direct flights by Asiana Airlines, T'way is scheduled to pick up the slack with twice weekly charter flights on Wednesdays and Saturdays, resulting in a small increase of 58 flights and 10,962 compared to January.

The charter flights will continue twice weekly flights from March 1, to April 26.

The additional T'way flights are only available for booking through main travel agencies in Korea under a co-op promotion between the airline and travel agencies.

REPAIR

From page 1

Transportation, and U.S. Department of the Interior, finally broke ground on the long-awaited Beach Road Improvement Project.

Gov. Arnold I. Palacios, Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang, Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan (D-MP), Saipan Mayor Ramon "RB" Camacho, members of the 23rd CNMI Legislature, Department of Public Works acting secretary Ray M. Yumul, Northern Marianas Housing Corp. chair Marcie M. Tomokane, NMHC corporate director Jesse S. Palacios, NMHC deputy corporate director Zenie Mafnas, and other guests broke ground on Phase 2, 3, and 4 of the project yesterday morning at the Garapan Fishing Base. Construction will begin in mid-March.

The project involves the resurfacing and other improvements to a significant portion of Beach Road within two years to address safety issues, traffic efficiency, stormwater diversion, roadway aesthetics, and other important elements.

Phase 2, which will cost $19,788,188, will cover the road's length from Hopwood Middle School or slightly south of the As Perdido Road Intersection in Chalan Piao, toward north of the Chalan Monsignor Guerrero Intersection (Atkins-Kroll Toyota intersection). The total length is approximately 12,500 feet or 2.28 miles.

Funding for the project came from the USDOT Federal Highway Administration at $8.01 million, USDOI giving $6 million, and the American Recovery Policy Act allocating $5.778 million.

Phases 3 and 4 will cost $7,888,388 and will cover north of the Chalan Monsignor Guerrero intersection (Atkins-Kroll Toyota intersection), toward the Navy Hill/Micro Beach Road intersection. The total length is approximately 16,322 feet of 3.09 miles. Funding is by the USDHUD through the CDBG-DR.

"Infrastructure development will not only help inject much needed funds into our local economy, but it will also ensure that we are replacing neglected or strained facilities that are in dire need of repair or upgrade. In addition to improving peoples' lives and livelihoods, the quality of our infrastructure will also help invite and entice new investments into the Marianas," said Gov. Arnold I. Palacios in a written statement.

In the ceremony, the governor recognized the hard work of the NMHC CDBG-DR team, DPW, Capital Improvement Program, and other agencies that were involved in the project. He also thanked Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan (D-MP) for his assistance in securing CDBG-DR funds for the CNMI.

Palacios also said at the ceremony that "it's about time we did this. …This is the beginning. We are going to start doing our work and work hard to make things happen for our people." He said the last time he remembers Beach Road being repaved was back when he was in still in high school.

Later in Mafnas' remarks, she said that throughout the project, "we promise not to lose momentum and not become complacent, as we understand how important this project is to our community." She thanked the federal agencies and their assistance "to allow the repairs of such projects as Beach Road. It will have a lifelong positive impact on the people of the CNMI."

DRT

From page 1

the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation to provide funding to purchase two vehicles for DRT's gaming surveillance operation.

During the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation meeting in the House of Representatives chamber, Aldan asked why DRT would need a $46,000 Toyota 4Runner V6 engine and a $42,000 Toyota Tacoma V6 engine to conduct such an operation.

Aldan said he totally agrees that DRT needs vehicles for its enforcement operation, but he is pretty sure there is no poker arcade up on Mt. Tapochau that would justify a four-wheel drive V6 vehicle to the tune of $46,000.

He said that, according to DRT, they need the vehicles to help conduct field operation such as overt and covert gaming surveillance. He said DRT stated these vehicles will be used for their daily tasks for gaming enforcement.

SNILD chair Rep. John Paul Sablan (Ind-Saipan) said that's a great question and that he would ask DRT about it.

Sablan said DRT is requesting SNILD for assistance with vehicle funding so they can assist them with their enforcement.

Senate President Edith E. DeLeon Guerrero (D-Saipan) said she is just curious to know if the indirect cost monies that are set aside from federal grants that are being held by the Department of Finance may be used to buy such needs as vehicle and fuel funding for the enforcement boats.

DeLeon Guerrero believes that is something that DOF could look into as she understands that indirect cost monies set aside from federal grants are in the millions of dollars.

She said it would be interesting to know if some of these needs of the Finance Department can be subsidized by the indirect cost allocation.

PAY HIKE

From page 1

entire government comes in light of the CNMI's current precarious financial situation.

"I want to assure you that we are exploring every opportunity to mitigate the impact of these circumstances," said the governor as he asked for cooperation and adherence to his directive.

Within-grade increases or step increases are periodic increases in an employee's rate of basic pay from one step of the grade of his or her position to the next higher step of that grade.

Under the Commonwealth Code, the within-grade increases and merit awards may be granted based upon the availability of funds.

If the governor determines that funds are not available and so announces by directive, the resulting missed increase will not be subject to retroactive payment. If funds are available, an employee may be granted a one step, within-grade increase upon the completion of each year (52 consecutive calendar weeks) of sustained satisfactory work performance.

The Commonwealth Code states that accumulative hours of leave without pay will delay the scheduled granting of a within-grade increase.

An employee may be awarded, in addition, a merit award (a one-time payment equal to the amount of the next one step increase in the employee's base salary) by achieving an overall performance rating of "Exceptional" upon completion of the 52 consecutive calendar weeks of sustained exceptional work performance corresponding to the employee's anniversary year. The merit award is a one-time performance award payment and not a salary step increase.

Such additional merit award shall not alter the employee's waiting period required for qualifying for the next within grade increase, according to the Commonwealth Code.

Reception celebrates Japanese emperor's 63rd birthday

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

CNMI government officials joined the Consular Office of Japan in celebrating the 63rd birthday of Emperor Naruhito last Thursday night at the Fiesta Hall of the Grandvrio Resort Saipan.

As has become a traditional yearly event, the Consular Office of Japan on Saipan, led this year by Japanese Consul to Saipan Ryogi Takagaki, marked the special occasion with speeches and a lavish dinner buffet spread.

Takagai welcomed everyone and said that he is glad to celebrate the emperor's birthday this year since it wasn't celebrated last year due to COVID-19, He then said that, with the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, it has made him realize the importance of peace. "The peace and prosperity we enjoy today is built on the ultimate sacrifice of those who lost their lives in the war. Even here in CNMI, we must not forget that while some of us have never experienced the war, we did not build this peace alone and we have an obligation to tell the next generations of the importance of peace."

He thanked Gov. Arnold I. Palacios, Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang, dignitaries and guests, officials of the federal and CNMI governments, and representatives of the business community that were present at the celebration.

Tomonori Ito, mayor of Katori City in Japan, which is a sister city to Saipan, had a speech that was read by Japanese Consul staff James Sakamoto, who said that Saipan and Katori have strong ties through the Katori Jingu Shrine in the Sugar King Park.

LEIGH GASES
Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang, center, makes a toast in celebration of the Emperor of Japan Naruhito's birthday last Thursday at the Fiesta Hall in the Grandvrio Resort Saipan. At right is Japan Consul to Saipan Ryogi Takagaki and at left is Japanese Consul staff James Sakamoto.

In the celebration, there were novelty goods from Katori City handed out to guests. There were hand towels with the city emblem of Katori City and art cards depicting historical Katori City townscape.

Apatang, who thanked the Japanese Consular Office for inviting everyone to help celebrate the emperor's birthday, recalled the times when friends from Katori City would visit Saipan before the pandemic. He then raised a toast to the Japanese emperor and said, "*Kanpai* everybody."

LEIGH GASES
Guests raise their glasses for a toast during Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang's toast in celebration of the Emperor of Japan Naruhito's birthday last Thursday at the Fiesta Hall in the Grandvrio Resort Saipan.

Learn more about the ocean via Project HOPE

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Project HOPE (Healthy Oceans & People Empowerment) is a free ocean science club for all students in grades 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th.

The Project HOPE (Healthy Oceans & People Empowerment) Spring 2023 free ocean science club is open for registration until March 2, 2023, for all students in grades 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th. Project HOPE is funded by a grant from the Administration of Native Americans and made available through a partnership with the Public School System.

Eligible students who join Project HOPE will be engaged in activities with a team consisting of natural sciences students of the Northern Marianas College, the CNMI's finest outreach specialists, and esteemed ocean elders in fascinating ocean science topics such as coral reefs, bays, estuaries, upwelling zones, and sakmans (native canoes).

Project HOPE sessions will be held once a week on Mondays at the Guma Sakman from 12:30pm to 5:30pm. Additionally, swimming lessons will be provided by the Dolphin Swim Club. 500 Sails will provide traditional sailing skills and marine-related science.

Sign up your child for an engaging and enriching afterschool program experience. Pre-registration can be accessed through the Friends of the Mariana Trench website: www.friendsmarianatrench.org or through our Instagram page @friendsofthemarianatrench. You can also use the QR codes on our Project HOPE flyers with registration and program information which can be found posted around the community and on our Facebook feed.

For more information, contact Romana Chong or Olympia Sablan at (670) 483-3668 or by email at rchong@friendsmarianatrench.org or osablan@friendsmarianatrench.org for more details. ***(PR)***

FOMT welcomes Dr. Steven Mana'oakamai Johnson

Johnson

Dr. Steven Mana'oakamai Johnson will be on Saipan to share recent research about the value of marine protected areas in the Marianas.

"In the Mariana Islands, the ocean is life. Since the first Chamorro arrived on the shores of these islands, responsible stewardship has been more than 'management'—it is a necessity. Today, many ocean conservation and management tools are at our disposal, but none are as widespread—or controversial—as marine protected areas," said Johnson.

In order to achieve local, national, and regional area-based conservation goals, MPAs are essential to the conservation of the world's oceans. Such targets are frequently only "met on paper" because they lack the political will or administrative support to result in effective conservation efforts.

On March 1, from 5:30pm to 6:30pm, Johnson will give a talk about this in the American Memorial Park. This presentation will share a recent assessment of the 18 MPAs located across the Marianas. ***(PR)***

SCC General Membership Meeting in March

The monthly General Membership Meeting of the Saipan Chamber of Commerce will be on Wednesday, March 1, 2023, from 11:30am to 1pm at the Queens Hall of the Kensington Hotel Saipan.

Guest speakers for the meeting are Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan, who will share updates from his congressional office, and Senate President Edith Deleon Guerrero of the CNMI 23rd Legislature, who will share her plans and goals for the CNMI business community.

Following after, the Chamber will be having the SCC committee chairs to present updates, current issues, and events of the chamber committees.

■ Government Relations Committee: Updates on legislation and Chamber position letters. (chair Joe Guerrero and co-chair Ron Smith)

■ Armed Forces Committee: Updates on AFC goals and missions for the year. (chair Brad Ruszala)

■ Education and Workforce Development Committee: Updates on the SCC Scholarship Program for Fall 2023 and Career Exploration Summer Internship. (chair Janice Tenorio)

■ Events Committee (chair Marcia Nishimura-Calvo)

■ 2023 Economic Forum Recap and Annual Golf Tournament

Lunch will be served at 11:30am and the meeting will begin promptly at noon. The luncheon fee is $25/Chamber member and $35/non-member. The SCC is accepting reservations, to reserve or for more information, contact the Chamber office at (670) 234-7150 or email contactus@saipanchamber.org.

The SCC is a non-profit organization whose mission is to empower our enterprises as a resource, advocate, and connector for Saipan's private sector. Its vision is to create an island where businesses, family, and community succeed as one.

For more information or to learn how to become a Chamber Member, visit online at www.saipanchamber.com, call 234-7150, or visit the 4th Floor of the Marianas Business Plaza (Room 413). ***(PR)***

NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING CORPORATION
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AMENDMENT NO. 1
INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)
NMHC IFB 2023-005

(This ad is paid for NMHC with HUD funds)

BID SUBMISSION DATE & TIME: ~~March 07~~ March 21, 2023, 10:00 a.m.

Purchase of Wildland Fire Truck for the Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services (DFEMS)

The IFB packet is available on February 17, 2023, at the NMHC website at www.nmhcgov.net by clicking on the "Procurement Tab". Interested bidders must register with the NMHC Procurement Officer via email at officemanager@nmhcgov.net.

Inquiries regarding this solicitation must be address in writing to Mr. Jacob Muna, Office Manager/Procurement Officer at P.O. Box 500514, Saipan MP 96950; email to officemanager@nmhcgov.net or fax to (670) 234-9021, no later than 10:00 a.m. February 22, 2023.

The provisions of the NMHC Procurement regulations, NMIAC 100-60-725 AND 100-60-730 Prohibiting Gratuities, Kickbacks and Contingent Fees shall apply.

For more information, contact Mr. Jacob Muna, Office Manager/Procurement Officer, at (670)234-6866/9447 or email at officemanager@nmhcgov.net during regular business hours, 7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, except CNMI holidays.

/s/ JESSE S. PALACIOS
Corporate Director
Northern Marianas Housing Corporation (NMHC)

/s/ MARCIE M. TOMOKANE
Chairwoman
NMHC Board of Directors

AGILE REAPER 2023

SENIOR AIRMAN PATRICK SULLIVAN

Airmen assigned to the 3rd Air Expeditionary Wing board a 517th Airlift Squadron C-17 Globemaster III at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Feb. 24, 2023. The airmen are traveling Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands for exercise Agile Reaper 23-1. AR 23-1 is the 3rd Air Expeditionary Wing's effort to exercise Agile Combat Employment and allows personnel to rehearse capabilities to provide air dominance, global mobility, and command/control for the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command commander.

SENIOR AIRMAN PATRICK SULLIVAN

U.S. Air Force Col. Kevin Jamieson, left, the 3rd Air Expeditionary Wing commander, and Col. Mike Fea, right, the 673d Medial Group commander and Defense Health Agency – Alaska Market director, discuss operations aboard a 517th Airlift Squadron C-17 Globemaster III at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Feb. 24, 2023. The airmen are traveling Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands for exercise Agile Reaper 23-1.

TECH. SGT. HAILEY STAKER

Loadmasters assigned to the 517th Airlift Squadron, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, guide a forklift to offload cargo at Tinian International Airport, Northern Mariana Islands, Feb. 26, 2023. Personnel, luggage and cargo arrived in support of Exercise Agile Reaper 23-1.

TECH. SGT. HAILEY STAKER

Senior Airman Nate Bredl, a loadmaster assigned to the 517th Airlift Squadron, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, unstraps luggage from a C-17 Globemaster III after landing at Tinian International Airport, Northern Mariana Islands, Feb. 26, 2023. Personnel, luggage and cargo arrived in support of Exercise Agile Reaper 23-1. AR 23-1 supports the Air Force's requirement for expeditionary skills necessary to operate outside of military installations; Airmen must have diverse skills that enable them to operate in a contested, degraded, and operationally limited environment. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Hailey Staker)

TECH. SGT. HAILEY STAKER

A forklift driver with the Tinian International Airport, Northern Mariana Islands, offloads cargo alongside loadmasters assigned to the 517th Airlift Squadron, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, for Exercise Agile Reaper 23-1, Feb. 26, 2023.

TECH. SGT. HAILEY STAKER

Col. Kevin Jamieson, left, the 3rd Air Expeditionary Wing commander, Chief Master Sgt. Nikki Drago, center, the 3rd AEW command chief, and Senior Master Sgt. Travis Kehoe, right, the 3rd AEW senior enlisted leader at Tinian International Airport, discuss Exercise Agile Reaper 23-1 operations Feb. 26, 2023.

TECH. SGT. HAILEY STAKER

Maj. Evan Allen, a C-17 Globemaster III pilot assigned to the 517th Airlift Squadron, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, secures seatbelts after arriving at Tinian International Airport, Northern Mariana Islands, Feb. 26, 2023. Allen, along with additional C-17 aircrews and loadmasters will provide airlift support for Exercise Agile Reaper 23-1.

TECH. SGT. HAILEY STAKER

A C-17 Globemaster III assigned to the 517th Airlift Squadron, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, sits on the flight line of Tinian International Airport, Northern Mariana Islands, after offloading personnel and cargo in support of Exercise Agile Reaper 23-1, Feb. 26, 2023. C-17 aircrews and loadmasters will provide airlift support for Exercise Agile Reaper 23-1.

TECH. SGT. HAILEY STAKER

A C-17 Globemaster III assigned to the 517th Airlift Squadron, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, takes off from Tinian International Airport, Northern Mariana Islands, after offloading personnel and cargo in support of Exercise Agile Reaper 23-1, Feb. 26, 2023. The C-17 Globemaster III is a multi-service C-17 that can carry large equipment, supplies and personnel directly to small airfields in harsh terrain anywhere in the world.

TECH. SGT. HAILEY STAKER

A C-17 Globemaster III assigned to the 517th Airlift Squadron, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, flies over Tinian International Airport, Northern Mariana Islands, after offloading personnel and cargo in support of Exercise Agile Reaper 23-1, Feb. 26, 2023.

19th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival just 'pika'

MVA

The 19th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival was held on Feb. 18-19, 2023, in San Jose, Tinian, in the Marianas. This event was organized by the Tinian Mayor's Office and the Marianas Visitors Authority.

MVA

Tinian Mayor Edwin Aldan welcomed festivalgoers on Feb. 17, 2023, at the opening ceremony of the 19th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival on Feb. 18 in San Jose, Tinian, in the Marianas.

MVA

The crowd participates in a group dance at the 19th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival, held on Feb. 18-19, 2023, in San Jose, Tinian, in the Marianas.

"Pika" is a Chamorro word in the Marianas meaning either "spicy" or "excellent." Both definitions apply to the festivities held on Feb. 18-19, 2023, at the 19th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival, known as "Pika Fest" among locals. The festival pays homage to the island's small but potent *donni'* hot pepper.

The festival had a soft opening at 7pm last Feb. 17 with the posting of colors by the Tinian Jr./Sr. High School JROTC Color Guard, followed by remarks from Tinian Mayor Edwin Aldan and other dignitaries. Activities included food sales, live entertainment, competitions, arts and crafts sales, and more.

Taking top honors in the Male and Female Hot Pepper Eating Contests were Tim Rolle and Jessica Cabrera, respectively. Luis B. Mundo served up the best spicy chicken to win the *"kadun pika"* cooking contest. The Pika Burger Eating Contest winning title was captured by Patrick Chance. David Bamba and Dolores Palacios took home the top cha-ching cash award for their cha-cha moves. The San Jose Parish Crusaders tore through the competition to win the tug-of-war contest. Crawling slowly to finish first in the "Umang" (hermit crab) Race were the entries of Galyug

MVA

Competition for the best *"kadun pika,"* a spicy chicken dish, was held at the 19th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival, held on Feb. 18-19, 2023, in San Jose, Tinian, in the Marianas.

Untalan in the Boys Division and Lilliyana Moreno in the Girls Division. The Karaoke queen for the youth was Jeriah Ann Cruz, while Colleen Cing took the title in the adult division. Fresku kept it fresh, garnering first place in the booth decorating competition. All contest winners received cash prizes.

"We express our profound gratitude to all our distinguished guests, off-island visitors, participating booth vendors, and most especially the sponsors for making the 19th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival a success!" said Aldan. "This year's festival would not have been possible without your generous donations and in-kind contributions to the Tinian Mayor's Office. Every one of you played an important role in making this year's Tinian Hot Pepper 'Pika' Festival a success through your participation, enthusiasm, and contributions. We hope everyone enjoyed the festivities, and we look forward to welcoming you all again next year! Thank you *yan un dangkulu na si yu'us ma'ase."*

The event is organized this year by the Office of the Mayor of Tinian and Aguiguan with support from the Marianas Visitors Authority. Additional sponsors were Saipan Marine Stevedore, Tan Siu Lin Foundation, DOCOMO Pacific, CNMI FPA Corp., Tinian Ice & Water Bottling Co., Black Micro Corp., Marpac Inc., Triple J Enterprise, Tinian Fuel Services, Tinian Shipping LLC, and Pacific Engineering Group & Services. The event was also supported by Karma Tent and Table Rental, Kana's Rental, Susan Perez House Rentals, Star Marianas Air, Inc., JC Café Restaurant, Eagles Enterprise, Commonwealth Utilities Corp., Telesource CNMI Inc., and 168 Poker.

The annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival is traditionally held on President's Day weekend in February. ***(MVA)***

MVA

The San Jose Parish Crusaders tugged the hardest to top the tug-of-war contest at the 19th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival, held on Feb. 18-19, 2023, in San Jose, Tinian, in the Marianas.

MVA

Winners of the karaoke contests claim their prizes at the 19th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival, held on Feb. 17, 2023, in San Jose, Tinian, in the Marianas. From left to right, Jeriah Ann Cruz, Letricia Palacios, Serenity Luzman, Payton Christian, Colleen Cing, Joan Oliverio, and Dillion Hee.

MVA

Honors for best decorated booth went to Fresku at the 19th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival, held on Feb. 18-19, 2023, in San Jose, Tinian, in the Marianas.

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
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EDITORIAL

The risk of vaccine hesitancy

One of the lingering—and potentially disastrous—effects of the COVID pandemic is that more parents are reluctant to have their children vaccinated against what used to be common childhood diseases, as well as against flu and the mutating coronavirus strains.

These diseases are nothing to play around with, especially when it comes to young children. Government and public health officials should make it a priority to spread the word that vaccines save lives. Failing to have children vaccinated can have serious consequences for those children and for others around them.

Already, some states have serious outbreaks of measles and chickenpox among children. Thanks to the development and widespread use of vaccines, today's parents may have had little experience with these diseases.

Before the vaccine was introduced in 1963, measles killed about 500 Americans each year, mostly children. Many others were left with lasting problems including blindness and neurological damage. Before the vaccine became available in 1995, chickenpox led to amputations and to deaths of infants, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems. Many older adults now are plagued with recurring bouts of painful shingles, a result of having chickenpox as a child.

Nor are these diseases totally eradicated. All it takes is a few unvaccinated people who interact closely, and these lurking pathogens can start to spread. Ninety percent of people who come into contact with someone who has measles will fall ill—if those people don't have the immunity two doses of MMR vaccine provide.

Why would parents not take advantage of readily available vaccines to protect their children?

The pandemic's disruption of our lives may be partly to blame. During the worst of the pandemic, many parents were unable to take their children to a doctor's office. An increase in at-home schooling meant fewer families needed to show proof of vaccination or seek an exemption to school vaccination requirements. Those parents who fell behind on vaccinations should be encouraged to make up for lost time.

More troubling is what appears to be a growing resistance to vaccines. There's been an anti-vaccine movement for years, fueled in part by misinformation from a false "study" claiming to have found a link between the MMR vaccine (measles, mumps and rubella) and autism. The study was thoroughly discredited and the author disqualified as a physician, but the false information lingers.

Unfortunately, the toxic political atmosphere in the United States during the pandemic fueled the anti-vaccine movement. Protecting public health, especially that of children, should be a cause all Americans support, but many people felt that whether a person wore a mask or got a shot was a political statement.

Public school mandates requiring vaccinations against such diseases as measles, chicken pox and polio have been one of the most effective weapons against these diseases.

*See **RISK** on Page 9*

Today's debt ceiling is tomorrow's dreaded debt bomb

By KARL W. SMITH
Bloomberg Opinion

Karl W. Smith is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist. Previously, he was vice president for federal policy at the Tax Foundation and assistant professor of economics at the University of North Carolina.

As disconcerting as the U.S.'s current debt situation is, the outlook is even worse. When the bipartisan Congressional Budget Office updated its forecasts this month, it estimated that debt held by the public will climb to $46 trillion by 2033 from $31 trillion currently. This puts the country one step closer to the dreaded "debt bomb" scenario, which would make today's battle over whether to raise the $31 trillion debt ceiling look quaint in comparison.

In short, a debt bomb occurs when a country's borrowings get so large that it has to borrow just to service the debt and meet interest payments. That, in theory, causes interest rates to rise, forcing a government to accumulate yet even more debt. In a sense, a debt bomb is a death spiral for a country.

There are ways out, but they're all painful. Once this pernicious cycle has started, the only way it can be arrested is by a sharp increase in taxes, an equally sharp decrease in spending or a default. The third scenario is unthinkable for the U.S., which oversees the world's primary reserve currency. Congress would undoubtedly take the steps necessary to prevent a default, but a rapid rise in taxes and collapse in spending would almost certainly throw the country into a severe recession – or worse.

So, where do things stand? The key stat to look at is federal interest payments as a percentage of gross domestic product. In 2022, such outlays amounted to 1.87% of GDP. Although that's higher than any time in the past 20 years, it's a fair bit lower than the 1991 peak of 3.16%. Indeed, it's lower than the entire period from 1980 to 2001.

That's not to say there aren't similarities between today and the period from 1980 to 2001. The most obvious is Federal Reserve policy. Just like now, the central bank then was pursuing a deliberate disinflationary policy. Policymakers need to keep interest rates high relative to the growth rate of the economy if it hopes to stamp out inflation. The downside to such a strategy is that even in good times, when government revenue surges, interest on existing debt would surge as well, preventing the budget deficit from narrowing by much.

What's different is that back then both the White House and Congress made decreasing the size of government a priority. Federal outlays as a percentage of GDP shrank from a peak of 22.9% in 1983 to 17.7% in 2001. The decline wasn't linear, with outlays increasing a bit from 1980 to 1983 as the effect of higher interest rates overwhelmed a drop in non-interest spending.

In contrast, the CBO projects federal outlays will rise from 23.7% of GDP in 2023 to 25.3% in 2033. Moreover, the CBO predicts that trend to continue indefinitely, with outlays reaching as much as 29% of GDP after 2044. As a result, federal interest payments are on track to reach 3.6% of GDP by 2033 and as much as 6.2% by 2044. The latter figure is twice as high as anything the U.S. has seen in the post-war period. If these projections are accurate the U.S. will become vulnerable to a debt-bomb scenario over the next 10 to 20 years.

What's really worrisome is that the CBO's estimates may actually be optimistic. The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB) produces alternative projections relative to the CBO baseline that have proven accurate. Under its scenarios, interest reaches 3.9% of GDP in 2033 and 4.4% in 2044. If the CRFB's high-cost scenario proves correct, federal interest payments as a percentage of GDP will reach record levels by 2025. That makes a debt-bomb a realistic possibility by the early 2030s.

One might hold out hope that higher revenues could alleviate the problem, but that would be going against history. The CBO estimates that federal revenues averaged 17.4% of GDP from 1974 to 2022. In 2022, they reached 19.6% on the back of booming asset prices and corporate profits. Thus, revenues are already well above historical norms and likely to decline in the future. Indeed, the CBO projects they will average 18.1% by 2032.

Revenues only played a small role when the federal budget was brought into balance over the 1980s and 1990s. In 1981, revenues were a then record 19.1% of GDP, before shrinking over most of the next 20 years, matching roughly the historical average. Closing the deficit gap with revenues alone would require unprecedented increases in tax receipts in the face of falling asset prices. That's extremely difficult to accomplish while maintaining the Biden administration's promise that no family making less $400,000 a year will see their taxes increase.

This leaves little hope that America will alter its fiscal trajectory over the next decade. Unless Congress and the White House make a sharp reversal and miraculously come up with a plan to shrink the deficit, the U.S. will be staring at the risk of a damaging debt bomb before too long.

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month 2023: Beyond the conversation

By CLEO NENING
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Cleo Nening is a programs coordinator at the Northern Marianas Protection and Advocacy Systems Inc.

As we approach March, we begin a trifecta of disability awareness campaigns with Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month being the kickstart to it all. March is nationally and locally celebrated as DDAM, with this year's theme being "Beyond the Conversation."

According to the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities, this theme was chosen to ask the questions: "Once the conversations have taken place, what comes next? What are communities doing to create change?" It is time to go beyond the conversation and take action. This theme can simply be interpreted as: the time for talking is over; now it is time for us to act to create this change.

Radical. Social. Change. These words often echo through my mind from a movie about the late Ruth Ginsburg, where she argued for equality for men and women. However, it shouldn't stop there. The radical social change we need for our community is to have our disability population thoroughly included as a part of society where their voices are heard and there is actual change because of it. Such change would include eliminating the stigma of being afraid or hesitant about hiring qualified individuals with disabilities. It is discouraging for anyone to hear that they may be a financial "liability" to a company, or that their disability "limits" their job duties and/or responsibilities, and therefore they cannot be hired.

The CNMI Disability Network Partners will be putting action to these conversations throughout the month of March with various types of training and outreach for individuals with developmental disabilities. March 1, 2023, will be the Saipan DDAM proclamation signing and recognition ceremony for the 2023 Champions of Equal Opportunity, which include awards for "Advocate of the Year," "Self-Advocate of the Year," "Employer Advocate of the Year" and much more. March 3, 2023, is the Saipan Celebrating Advocates Day, which highlights various self-advocacy activities and skills for our participants. Further dates for Tinian and Rota will be announced in March.

Additionally, the Northern Marianas Protection & Advocacy Systems, Inc. will be conducting outreach to high school students in the special education program (more specifically, transition-aged students seniors). During the week of March 20-23, 2023, our outreach will focus on and emphasize post-high school transition either to the workforce or postsecondary education with available local resources, tips, disability laws, and more.

NMPASI is the CNMI designated organization that protects the civil, legal, and human rights of people with disabilities. For more information on our programs and services, please contact NMPASI at our office numbers (670) 235-7273/4 or visit our website at www.nmpasi.org.

Some surprising findings about content moderation

LUCAS RENTSCHLER and WILL RINEHART
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court held oral arguments for a case that could substantially alter the internet. While the case was specifically focused on who should be held liable for automatic recommendations, the justices will ultimately be deciding how platforms manage content moderation and misinformation.

While there are a lot of unanswered questions in content moderation, a paper we just published is one of the few rigorous studies of fact-checking that could settle some of them. It offers two striking insights.

First, we find that crowdsourcing fact-checks, much like Twitter's Birdwatch program, are incredibly effective. Overall, it does a better job than just relying on the platform to police content.

Second, we find that platforms should focus moderation efforts on policing content, rather than policing individuals. In other words, suspending accounts probably does more harm than good.

Nearly everyone agrees that misinformation is a problem. Upward of 95% of people cite it as a challenge when accessing news or other information. But there is little agreement about the right mix of policies that can balance the need for context without needlessly censoring content.

Rightly, everyone is concerned that platforms are picking and choosing which content to flag. Previous work from our lab has shown that social media platforms have a vested interest in policing misinformation. If companies want to promote user engagement and connections, they will need to address misinformation.

On top of this, measuring how misinformation affects real-world events is a tough empirical challenge for researchers. The Experimental Economics Lab, which is a part of the Center for Growth and Opportunity (CGO) at Utah State University, was set up specifically to understand these tangled questions.

This study, which is part of a larger research program on misinformation, was set up to evaluate fact-checking policies in a controlled laboratory experiment. Importantly, the decisions made by participants affect the amount of money they earn, so misinformation has real consequences. The study was also structured to allow people to interact with others over multiple rounds via a messaging system that replicates a platform. While no study is perfect, ours comes as close as possible to approximating real-world decision-making on platforms.

Three kinds of fact-checking scenarios were tested. In one version, individuals could fact-check information shared by other group members but they had to pay a small fee for it. The second scenario placed fact-checking in the hands of the platform and was randomly varied. Finally, we tested a combination of the two, both individual and platform fact-checking.

There were two consequences of posting misinformation. If misinformation was identified, it was flagged, so that participants knew. Likewise, users who were found to have posted misinformation were automatically fact-checked in the following round.

The results are remarkable. It is widely assumed that peer-to-peer monitoring, especially when users must pay to fact-check content, would lead to bad outcomes. But to the contrary, we find that this approach yields better outcomes than just relying on the platform. We also found that adding platform moderation to this peer-to-peer approach has only a small additional benefit.

Platforms would do well to leverage this pro-social behavior because it does not require them to evaluate posts, it provides more objective fact-checking, and it is transparent.

In other words, social media users can be relied upon for fact-checking.

Even more important, the research suggests that added scrutiny for users who post misinformation doesn't really lead to deterrence. Simultaneously, it can lower user engagement. Given this, platforms are likely to be better off focusing their efforts on individual posts, rather than trying to identify bad actors and banning them from the platform.

In total, our results provide support for Twitter's current approach to content moderation. Birdwatch's decentralized and user-provided evaluations are effective. And the decision to be extremely judicious in banning accounts that have posted misinformation is the right move.

It seems that Elon and Jack have the right idea.

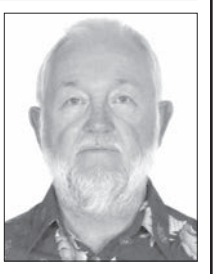
Lucas Rentschler is the Director of the Experimental Economics Lab at the Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University. Will Rinehart is a Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University.

February is Fleeing Fast

LITERARY NOOK

By JOEY CONNOLLY
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Joey aka Pepe Batbon Connolly is a retired educator who taught in the CNMI, NOLA, and LVNV. He is a sonnet practitioner who enjoys stargazing.



February seems to forever flee and fly fast
Time for fresh reef fish on our Lenten menu
Poetry from Black History's century now past
Brotherly love is today's sonnet purview.

I would like to share these four quatrains from Countee Cullen's short poem, "Song in Spite of Myself." They are from his 1929 book of poems, The Black Christ and Other Poems, written when he was 26 years old. He has been inspiring me throughout this year's Black History Month.

"Never love with all your heart,
It only ends in aching;
And bit by bit to the smallest part
That organ will be breaking.

Never love with all your mind,
It only ends in fretting:
In musings on sweet joys behind,
Too poignant for forgetting.

Never love with all your soul,
For such there is no ending,
Though a mind that frets may find control,
And a shattered heart finds mending.

Give but a grain of the heart's rich seed,
Confine some under cover,
And when love goes, bid him God-speed.
And find another lover.

The following sonnet is dedicated to my older brother Peter, who is a retired sheriff, father, and grandfather. He's been a good father, a great storyteller, joker, and doesn't drink alcohol, but Peter is a great eater. His grandchildren call him "Poppie Pete." "For the love of Pete" (or Mike or God) is an exclamation of surprise, exasperation, or some similar feeling. St. Peter's name is used for Christ's (or God's) sake. St. Peter's name is considered less offensive than taking God's name in vain. I used to hear the old timer's say, "For Pete's sake!"

For Pete's Sake

The love of overeating can be called gluttony
When we nourish babies, we must be gentle
The love of eating sheep can be called muttony
My jerkball loudmouth makes me mental
Love for drinking wine makes us an oenophile
Love for humor makes some of us bust a gut
Snake oil salesmen wriggle on bellies like a reptile
Rattlesnake preachers are a poisonous crazy lot
Many cheap buffet overeaters seem to remember
Eating plenty of fried foods with friends and wife
Fattening foods galore from January.to December
Bacon so thick you have to cut it with knife
Give me a green salad, baked potato, and T-bone steak
Get me a 'bento' takeout box for Pete's sake!

RISK
From Page 8

Unfortunately, the recent political battles and misleading rhetoric over COVID have fueled mistrust of other vaccines. Polls show that although they are still a minority, increasing numbers of parents believe that they alone should decide whether their children get vaccinated. All states have exemptions to vaccination mandates for medical reasons, and most states grant exemptions for religious reasons.

A few states allow exemptions for "philosophical" reasons. Making it too easy for parents to opt out of vaccines for their children is dangerous, for their children and for those who aren't vaccinated for legitimate medical reasons.

We need a robust campaign to help parents understand the importance of getting their children vaccinated against childhood diseases, and to get the word out that vaccines are safe. In Virginia, Gov. Glenn Youngkin could take the lead, promoting vaccines as a way to protect children's health—a goal that everyone should support. Leaders should work with state and local public health officials to spread the word that vaccines work. How tragic for a child to die or be permanently damaged by a disease that could so easily have been prevented.

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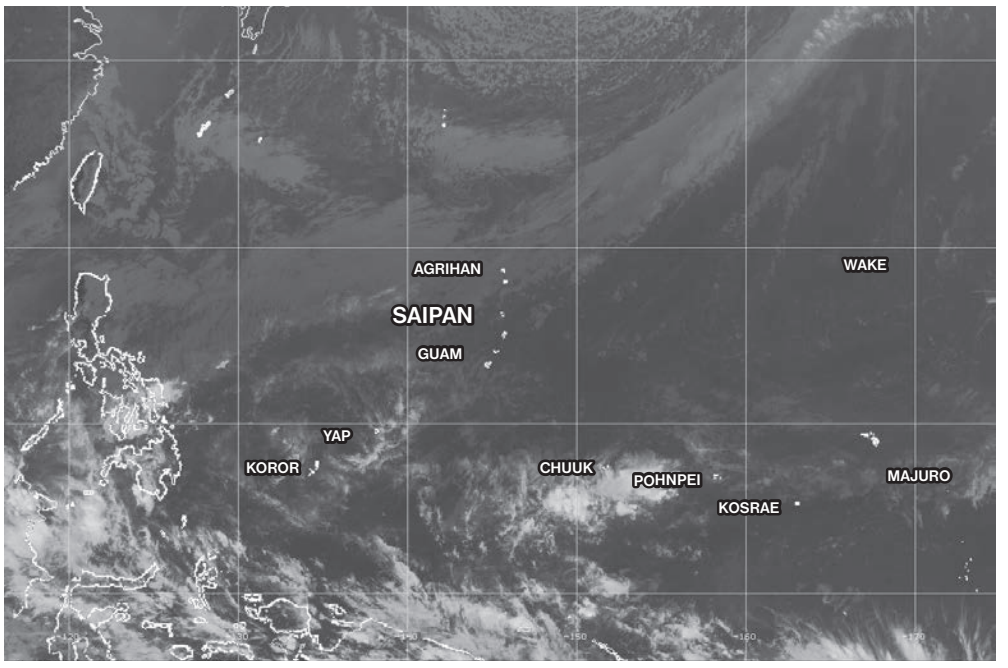
The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Isolated showers. Partly sunny	Scattered showers. Partly sunny	Partly sunny	Partly sunny	A chance of showers. Partly sunny
86º / 76º	86º / 75º	86º / 75º	86º / 75º	86º / 75º

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 9:28 AM, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2023

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Satellite and radar show partly cloudy skies with isolated showers within the coastal waters this morning. Buoys within the coastal waters show combined seas of 6 to 7 feet.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Partly Cloudy	85° / 76°
Palau	Thunderstorms	84° / 76°
Yap	Thunderstorms	84° / 79°
Chuuk	Scattered Thunderstorms	85° / 79°
Pohnpei	Partly Cloudy	85° / 78°
Kosrae	Mostly Cloudy	85° / 80°
Majuro	Partly Cloudy	82° / 78°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:35 AM	6:24 PM
Wednesday	6:34 AM	6:24 PM
Thursday	6:33 AM	6:24 PM
Friday	6:33 AM	6:24 PM
Saturday	6:32 AM	6:25 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	-	12:57 AM	12:21 PM
Wednesday	-	1:51 AM	1:11 PM
Thursday	-	2:44 AM	2:02 PM
Friday	-	3:33 AM	2:55 PM
Saturday	-	4:20 AM	3:47 PM

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Mostly Sunny	73° / 59°
Beijing	Mostly Sunny	60° / 30°
Hong Kong	Partly Cloudy	70° / 60°
Honolulu	Mostly Sunny/Wind	79° / 71°
London	Mostly Cloudy	48° / 39°
Los Angeles	Rain	53° / 44°
Manila	Partly Cloudy	86° / 76°
Melbourne	Cloudy	65° / 57°
Miami	Partly Cloudy	82° / 66°
New York	Mostly Cloudy	43° / 36°
Osaka	Sunny	59° / 42°
Paris	Mostly Sunny	45° / 30°
Busan	Mostly Cloudy	59° / 47°
Rome	Rain	58° / 47°
Salem	Showers	79° / 61°
San Francisco	Rain/Wind	51° / 45°
Seoul	Partly Cloudy	51° / 37°
Tokyo	Sunny	66° / 45°
Washington, DC	Showers	49° / 41°

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
3:53 AM	Low Tide	1.36
8:06 AM	High Tide	1.18
12:54 PM	Low Tide	1.49
9:09 PM	High Tide	0.03

NEWS DESK For news tips, corrections and requests for news coverage, call (670) 235-NEWS (6397), 235-2440, fax 235,3740. E-mail: editor@saipantribune.com. Website:www.saipantribune.com.

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF FEBRUARY 1, 2023

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA117	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	5:30AM	7:25AM	Daily
UA193	7:55PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau
UA183	8:00PM	9:50PM	Daily

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

UA117/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam
UA117/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau
OZ624/701	3:50PM	10:35AM+1	3,6 via Incheon

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

TW308	3:15AM	6:55AM	1, 4, 5, 7
TW9308	3:50AM	7:20AM	1, 4, 5, 7
OZ624	3:50PM	7:40PM	3, 6
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:46AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA189	12:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA189/174	12:40AM	8:46AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:46AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:46AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
OZ704/623	11:50PM	2:20PM+1	2, 5 via Incheon

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

OZ623	9:00AM	2:20PM	3, 6
7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
TW307	8:45PM	2:15AM+1	3, 4, 6, 7
TW9307	9:20PM	2:50AM+1	3, 4, 6, 7

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

MARIANAS SOUTHERN AIRWAYS

INITIAL DAILY FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF FEBRUARY 13, 2023

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
11:20 A.M.	11:38 A.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
3:40 P.M.	3:58 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
9:40 A.M.	9:58 A.M.	6,7

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
12:00 P.M.	12:18 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
4:20 P.M.	4:38 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
10:20 A.M.	10:38 A.M.	6,7

SAIPAN TO ROTA

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
7:20 A.M.	8:00 A.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
5:00 P.M.	5:40 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
7:40 A.M.	8:20 A.M.	6,7

ROTA TO SAIPAN

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
10:20 A.M.	11:00 A.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
6:00 P.M.	6:40 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
8:40 A.M.	9:20 A.M.	6,7

SAIPAN TO GUAM

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
12:00 P.M.	1:00 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2:00 P.M.	3:00 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
7:00 P.M.	8:00 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
11:00 A.M.	12:00 P.M.	6,7

GUAM TO SAIPAN

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1:30 P.M.	2:30 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
5:30 P.M.	6:30 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
9:00 P.M.	10:00 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
12:30 P.M.	1:30 P.M.	6,7

ROTA TO GUAM

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
8:20 A.M.	8:55 A.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
4:25 P.M.	5:00 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

GUAM TO ROTA

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
9:25 A.M.	10:00 A.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
3:30 P.M.	4:05 P.M.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7)

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JUNE 1, 2022

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	8:30	9:00	Daily
1302	11:00	11:30	Mon/Wed/Fri
1302	12:00	12:30	Tues/Thurs/Sat/Sun
1303	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	13:00	13:30	Tues/Thurs/Sat/Sun
3102	14:00	14:30	Mon/Wed/Fri
3103	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

LIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	12:00	12:30	Mon/Wed/Fri

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	13:00	13:30	Mon/Wed/Fri

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1202	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	10:00	10:15	Daily
1208	14:00	14:15	Daily
1209	15:00	15:15	Daily
1210	16:00	16:15	Daily
1211	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2102	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	10:30	10:45	Daily
2108	14:30	14:45	Daily
2109	15:30	15:45	Daily
2110	16:30	16:45	Daily
2111	17:30	17:45	Daily

Business

Trench Tech urges you to fight back to get in shape

By MARK RABAGO
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Trench Tech Purebred Saipan Academy and Gym is giving those on the fence about mixed martial arts training a great deal to start the year.

Until June 1, the Mihaville Estates gym is offering circuit training, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, wrestling, and K1 boxersize at $5 off the original prices.

Trench Tech also offers a $10 drop-in fee per class for those who do not want to commit to the monthly charges. Kids classes for ages 5-12 in both BJJ and MMA are also available.

For a limited time, circuit training costs $50 a month and is held every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 5:30pm to 6:15pm.

Monday and Friday is boxersize/kickboxing from 6:30pm to 8pm and it will only hold you back $40 a month.

Kids BJJ 5-12 years old are Tuesday and Thursday from 5:35pm to 6:20pm, followed by adult BJJ classes from 6:30pm to 8pm every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Kids MMA class is every Saturday only from 9:30am-10:30am. Kids BJJ and kids MMA is $40 a month, while adult BJJ is $70 a month.

Adult Nogi or jiu jitsu without the kimono is every Wednesday from 6:30pm to 8pm and open mat is every Saturday from 11am to 12:30pm.

For combined packages, kids BJJ and kids MMA is $70 a month and adult kickboxing and BJJ is $85 a month, while circuit training, kickboxing/boxersize, and BJJ classes for adults is $125 a month.

Just some of the local MMA fighters training under the Trench Tech stable are Shane "Pikaboo" Alvarez, Albert "Prince" Jackson, and Kelvin "The Big Hit" Fitial.

"I am inviting and encouraging everyone to come down to our gym in the name of wellbeing and fitness! This is a great opportunity to invest in your most important asset, which is your health!" said Trench Tech Purebred Saipan owner Justis "Cuki" Alvarez.

Trench Tech Purebred Saipan Academy and Gym is located in the Mihaville Estates across Century Hotel and Shirley's Coffee Shop.

For directions, take Gobietno Road into Mihaville Estate, then take your second right into Adilantano Loop. the gym is the second house on the right. The Trench Tech Purebred Academy and Gym is at the back. Park alongside the curb sidewalk and take the stairs down at the gate.

For more information, call (670) 783-4662 or message them on their Facebook page.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Trench Tech Purebred Saipan Academy and Gym owner Cuki Alvarez, sixth from left, poses with the Nogi or jiu jitsu class.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Boxersize/kickboxing is held Monday and Friday from 6:30pm to 8pm at Trench Tech Purebred Saipan Academy and Gym.

UK and EU leaders to meet amid hope of Brexit trade spat fix

LONDON (AP)—British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Union leader Ursula von der Leyen are set to hold face-to-face talks, with expectations high they will seal a deal to resolve a thorny post-Brexit trade dispute.

That would mark a breakthrough after months of bitter wrangling that has soured U.K.-EU relations, sparked the collapse of the Belfast-based regional government and and threatened to set back Northern Ireland's decades-old peace process.

In a joint statement on Sunday the U.K. and the EU said European Commission President von der Leyen will travel to Britain on Monday so the leaders can work towards "shared, practical solutions for the range of complex challenges around the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland."

Sunak's office set out a tightly choreographed agenda for Monday suggesting a deal is all but done. It said the leaders' lunchtime "final talks" would be followed by a meeting of the U.K. Cabinet, then, if there is a deal, by a joint news conference and a statement by Sunak to the House of Commons.

U.K. Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab said earlier Sunday that the two sides were on the "cusp" of striking an agreement over trade rules known as the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Northern Ireland is the only part of the U.K. that shares a border with an EU member, the Republic of Ireland. When the U.K. left the bloc in 2020, the two sides agreed to keep the Irish border free of customs posts and other checks because an open border is a key pillar of Northern Ireland's peace process.

Instead there are checks on some goods entering Northern Ireland from the rest of the U.K. That angered British unionist politicians in Belfast, who say the new trade border in the Irish Sea undermines Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom.

The Democratic Unionist Party collapsed Northern Ireland's Protestant-Catholic power-sharing government a year ago in protest and has refused to return until the rules are scrapped or substantially rewritten.

Relations between the U.K. and the EU, severely tested during years of Brexit wrangling, chilled still further amid disputes over the Northern Ireland Protocol. The British government introduced a bill that would let it unilaterally rip up parts of the Brexit agreement, a move the EU called illegal. The bloc accused the U.K. of failing to honor the legally binding treaty it had signed.

The mood between London and Brussels improved after Sunak, a pragmatic Brexit supporter, took office in October, replacing more belligerent predecessors Boris Johnson and Liz Truss.

Striking a deal would let Sunak "get Brexit done" in a way that eluded Johnson, who won a landslide election victory on that very slogan in 2019, three years after British voters narrowly opted in a referendum to leave the bloc.

Johnson did lead the U.K. out of the now 27-nation EU in 2020, but with a divorce deal that left Northern Ireland still bound to some EU rules and standards in a way that caused headaches for businesses and upset Northern Ireland's delicate political balance.

U.K. and EU negotiators have been inching towards a solution during weeks of intense talks, but any deal with the bloc carries political risk for Sunak. Hints of compromise towards the EU have sparked opposition from hardline euroskeptics in Sunak's governing Conservative Party, including Johnson.

The DUP also has warned it will oppose any deal that does not meet its demand for "significant, substantive change."

A deal is likely to remove customs checks on the vast majority of goods moving between the U.K. and Northern Ireland.

The thorniest issue is the role of the European Court of Justice in resolving any disputes that arise over the rules. Britain and the EU agreed in their Brexit divorce deal to give the European court that authority, but the DUP and Conservative Brexiteers insist the court must have no jurisdiction in U.K. matters.

Sunak insisted a deal would meet unionist demands.

"As someone who believes in Brexit, voted for Brexit, campaigned for Brexit, I want to demonstrate that Brexit works and it works for every part of the United Kingdom," he told the Sunday Times.

"There's unfinished business on Brexit and I want to get the job done."

North Korea holds rare meeting on farming amid food shortage

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—North Korean leader Kim Jong Un opened a major political conference dedicated to agriculture, state media reported Monday, amid outside assessments that suggest the country is facing a serious shortfall of food.

South Korean experts estimate that North Korea is short around 1 million tons of grain, 20 percent of its annual demand, after the pandemic disrupted both farming and imports from China.

Recent, unconfirmed, reports have said an unknown number of North Koreans have died of hunger. But observers have seen no indication of mass deaths or famine in North Korea.

During a high-level meeting of the ruling Workers' Party that began Sunday, senior party officials reviewed last year's work on state goals to accomplish "rural revolution in the new era," the official Korean Central News Agency reported.

The report said that the meeting of the party's Central Committee will identify "immediate, important" tasks on agricultural issues and "urgent tasks arising at the present stage of the national economic development."

KNCA didn't say whether Kim spoke during the meeting or how long it would last. Senior officials such as Cabinet Premier Kim Tok Hun and Jo Yong Won, one of Kim's closest aides who handles the Central Committee's organizational affairs, were also attending.

The meeting is the first time the party has convened a plenary session only to discuss agriculture. Monday's report didn't elaborate on its agenda, but the party's Politburo said earlier this month that a "a turning point is needed to dynamically promote radical change in agricultural development."

Most analysts North Korea's food situation today is nowhere near the extremes of the 1990s, when hundreds of thousands of people died in a famine. However, some experts say its food insecurity is likely at its worst since Kim took power in 2011, after COVID-19 restrictions further shocked an economy battered by decades of mismanagement and crippling U.S.-led sanctions imposed over Kim's nuclear program.

In early 2020, North Korea tried to shield its population from the coronavirus by imposing stringent border controls that choked off trade with China, its main ally and economic lifeline. Russia's war on Ukraine possibly worsened the situation by driving up global prices of food, energy and fertilizer, on which North Korea's agricultural production is heavily dependent.

Nation

Millions who rely on Medicaid may be booted from program

WASHINGTON (AP)—If you get health care coverage through Medicaid, you might be at risk of losing that coverage over the next year.

Roughly 84 million people are covered by the government-sponsored program, which has grown by 20 million people since January 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

But as states begin checking everyone's eligibility for Medicaid for the first time in three years, as many as 14 million people could lose access to that health care coverage.

A look at why so many people may no longer qualify for the Medicaid program over the next year and what you need to know if you're one of those people who relies on the program.

AP

A physical therapist works with a patient at a field hospital operated by Care New England set up in a former bank call center to handle a surge of COVID-19 patients in Cranston, R.I, Dec. 14, 2020.

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO MEDICAID?

At the beginning of the pandemic, the federal government prohibited states from kicking people off Medicaid, even if they were no longer eligible. Before the pandemic, people would regularly lose their Medicaid coverage if they started making too much money to qualify for the program, gained health care coverage through their employer or moved into a new state.

That all stopped once COVID-19 started spreading across the country.

Over the next year, states will be required to start checking the eligibility again of every person who is on Medicaid. People will have to fill out forms to verify their personal information, including address, income and household size.

WHEN MIGHT I LOSE MY COVERAGE?

That will vary depending on which state you live in; some states are moving faster than others to check eligibility. Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oklahoma and West Virginia are among the states that will begin removing ineligible Medicaid recipients as early as April.

Other states will start taking that step in May, June or July.

Not everyone will be removed from the program all at once. States plan to verify all recipients' eligibility over periods of nine months to one year.

HOW WILL I BE NOTIFIED IF I'M LOSING COVERAGE?

If you rely on Medicaid for care, it's important to update your contact information, including home address, phone number and email with the state from which you receive benefits.

States will mail a renewal form to your home. The federal government also requires states to contact you in another way—by phone, text message or email—to remind you to fill out the form.

Even if mailed notices reach the right address, they can be set aside and forgotten, said Kate McEvoy, executive director of the nonprofit National Association of Medicaid Directors.

"A text might just grab someone's attention in a way that would be more accessible," she said, noting that a quick message also may be less intimidating than a mailed notice.

Most states have already used texting for things such as reminding patients to get a COVID-19 vaccine or about upcoming doctor's visits. But sending mass texts on Medicaid eligibility will be new, McEvoy said.

You will have at least 30 days to fill out the form. If you do not fill out the form, states will be able to remove you from Medicaid.

WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS IF I'M KICKED OFF MEDICAID?

Many people who will no longer qualify for Medicaid coverage can turn to the Affordable Care Act's marketplace for coverage, where they'll find health care coverage options that may cost less than $10 a month.

But the coverage available on the marketplace will still be vastly different from what's offered through Medicaid. Out-of-pocket expenses and co-pays are often higher. Also, people will need to check if the insurance plans offered through the marketplace will still cover their doctors.

A special enrollment period will open for people who are unenrolled from Medicaid that will start on March 31 and last through July 31, 2024. People who lose Medicaid coverage will have up to 60 days to enroll after losing coverage, according to guidance the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services sent to states last month.

MY CHILDREN ARE ENROLLED IN MEDICAID. WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THEIR COVERAGE?

More than half of U.S. children receive health care coverage through Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Even if you receive a notice that you're no longer eligible for Medicaid, it's likely that your child still qualifies for the program or for health care coverage through CHIP, which covers children whose families make too much money qualify for Medicaid but don't earn enough to afford private health insurance.

Between 80% and 90% percent of children will still be eligible for those programs, according to estimates from the Georgetown University Health Policy Institute's Center for Children and Families.

"When a parent receives a message that they aren't eligible anymore, they often assume their child is no longer eligible either," said Joan Alker, the center's executive director. "It's more common to find that the parent is no longer eligible for Medicaid, but the child still is."

Failing at polls, election deniers focus on state GOP posts

PARKER, Colo (AP)—In a basement event space in the Denver suburb of Parker, Tina Peters surveyed a crowd of Colorado Republicans last week and made an unusual pitch for why she should become chair of their beleaguered party: "There's no way a jury of 12 people is going to put me in prison."

Peters was referring to her upcoming trial on seven felony charges related to her role in allegedly accessing confidential voting machine data while she was clerk in western Colorado's Mesa County. The incident made her a hero to election conspiracy theorists but unpopular with all but her party's hardest-core voters.

Peters, who condemns the charges as politically motivated, finished second in last year's GOP primary for secretary of state, Colorado's top elections position.

Now Peters has become part of a wave of election deniers who, unable to succeed at the polls, have targeted the one post—state party chair—that depends entirely on those hardest-core Republicans.

Embracing election conspiracy theories was a political albatross for Republicans in states that weren't completely red last year, with deniers losing every statewide bid in the swing states of Arizona, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. But the movement has focused on GOP state party chairs—positions that usually are selected by only dedicated activists and have the power to influence the party's presidential nominating contest and some aspects of election operations, such as recruiting poll watchers.

"The rise of this dangerous ideology nationwide and the rise within party machinery are ominous," said Norm Eisen, a prominent Washington lawyer and former ambassador who is executive chair of States United Democracy Center, which tracks election deniers. "It's an outrageous phenomenon."

Kristina Karamo, a former community college instructor who lost her bid last fall to become Michigan's secretary of state by 14 percentage points, won the chair of the Michigan Republican Party a week ago. She beat a fellow election denier, failed attorney general candidate Matthew DePerno.

In Kansas, Mike Brown, a conspiracy theorist who lost his primary bid for secretary of state, was named chair of the state party.

Peters is just one of multiple candidates for the Colorado position who have repeated former President Donald Trump's lies that President Joe Biden did not legitimately win the 2020 election.

"We can't just say, 'Oh, it's time to get over 2020 and be done with that,'" said Aaron Wood, a self-described Christian conservative father also running for Colorado GOP chair, who organized a slate of candidates to take over the party's top posts. "Until I have 100% confidence that the election has integrity, I will not be done with that."

ACROSS THE NATION

NTSB says medical plane apparently broke apart before crash

STAGECOACH, Nev. (AP)—A medical transport flight that crashed in a mountainous area in northern Nevada, killing five all five people aboard the plane including a patient, apparently broke apart before hitting the ground, authorities said Sunday. The National Transportation Safety Board has sent in a seven-member team of investigators to the site of Friday night's crash near Stagecoach. "How do we know if the airplane broke up in flight? We found parts of the airplane one-half to three-quarters of a mile away" from the crash scene, NTSB Vice Chair Bruce Landsberg said at a news briefing in Carson City. Landsberg said in the afternoon briefing that a team spent all day looking for pieces of the downed plane. He added investigators would likely be on site for several days before the wreckage of the single-engine Pilatus PC-12 is moved so investigators can try to determine a possible crash cause. The plane was built in 2002. "Right now, we just don't know. This is like a three dimensional puzzle," Landsberg said. "It's harder when you don't have the pieces all in one place."

Michigan power crews work, California recovers after storms

Some Michigan residents faced a fourth straight day without power Sunday as crews continued work to restore electricity more than 165,000 homes and businesses in the greater Detroit area following last week's ice storm. Leah Thomas, whose home north of Detroit lost power Wednesday night, was still waiting Sunday afternoon for the power to come back. Thomas said she feels lucky that she and their 17-year-old son have been able to stay at her parents' nearby home, which still has power, while they are in Florida. With her husband traveling out of town, Thomas said it was up to her to recharge the battery to their home's backup sump pump Sunday with her car. She went to multiple stores to find a long cable for the task. "I'm a strong woman. I figured it out," she said. "Our basement is OK, so we're the lucky ones."

Contaminated waste shipments from Ohio derailment to resume

EAST PALESTINE, Ohio (AP)—Shipment of contaminated waste from the site of a fiery train derailment earlier this month in eastern Ohio near the Pennsylvania state line will resume Monday to two approved sites in Ohio, according to federal environmental authorities. The announcement came a day after the Environmental Protection Agency ordered Norfolk Southern to "pause" shipments from the site of the Feb. 3 derailment in East Palestine to allow additional oversight measures about where waste was shipped. Some liquid and solid waste had already been taken to sites in Michigan and Texas. EPA-certified facilities able to accept some of the waste had been identified, which meant shipments could restart Monday, Region 5 administrator Debra Shore, of the Environmental Protection Agency, said Sunday. Some of the liquid waste will be sent to a facility in Vickery, Ohio, for disposal in an underground injection well, Shore said. Norfolk Southern will also begin shipping solid waste to an incinerator in East Liverpool, Ohio, and additional solid waste disposal locations were being sought, she said.

Asia

CIA chief: China doubts ability to invade Taiwan

WASHINGTON (AP)—U.S. intelligence shows that China's President Xi Jinping has instructed his country's military to "be ready by 2027" to invade Taiwan though he may be currently harboring doubts about his ability to do so given Russia's experience in its war with Ukraine, CIA Director William Burns said.

Burns, in a television interview that aired Sunday, stressed that the United States must take "very seriously" Xi's desire to ultimately control Taiwan even if military conflict is not inevitable.

"We do know, as has been made public, that President Xi has instructed the PLA, the Chinese military leadership, to be ready by 2027 to invade Taiwan, but that doesn't mean that he's decided to invade in 2027 or any other year as well," Burns told CBS' "Face the Nation."

"I think our judgment at least is that President Xi and his military leadership have doubts today about whether they could accomplish that invasion," he said.

Taiwan and China split in 1949 after a civil war that ended with the Communist Party in control of the mainland. The self-governing island acts like a sovereign nation yet is not recognized by the United Nations or any major country. In 1979, President Jimmy Carter formally recognized the government in Beijing and cut nation-to-nation ties with Taiwan. In response, Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act, creating a benchmark for a continuing relationship.

Taiwan has received numerousdisplays of official American support for the island democracy in the face of growing shows of force by Beijing, which claims Taiwan as part of its territory. President Joe Biden has said that American forces would defend Taiwan if China tries to invade. The White House says U.S. policy has not changed in making clear that Washington wants to see Taiwan's status resolved peacefully. It is silent as to whether U.S. forces might be sent in response to a Chinese attack.

In Sunday's interview, Burns said the support from the U.S. and European allies for Ukraine following Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of that country may be acting as a potential deterrent to Chinese officials for now but said the risks of a possible attack on Taiwan will only grow stronger.

"I think, as they've looked at Putin's experience in Ukraine, that's probably reinforced some of those doubts," Burns said. "So, all I would say is that I think the risks of, you know, a potential use of force probably grow the further into this decade you get and beyond it, into the following decade as well.

ASIAN BRIEFS

Philippines marks 1986 revolt with dictator's son as leader

MANILA, Philippines (AP)— Pro-democracy protesters in the Philippines marked the anniversary on Saturday of the 1986 army-backed "people power" revolt with the son of the dictator, who was ousted in that uprising, now leading the country. About 1,400 demonstrators, some waving Philippine flags and holding placards that read "Never forget," gathered at a democracy shrine along the main EDSA highway in metropolitan Manila. Left-wing activists, carrying an effigy that depicted President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. as a pest, protested separately at a nearby pro-democracy monument. Faced with the awkward situation of issuing a statement to mark the revolt that toppled his namesake father, Marcos Jr. called for reconciliation without citing the event as a democratic milestone, as his predecessors had done. "I once again offer my hand of reconciliation to those with different political persuasions to come together as one in forging a better society — one that will pursue progress and peace and a better life for all Filipinos," he said in a two-paragraph statement he posted on Facebook. Renato Reyes of the left-wing alliance Bayan said the president's offer was a "good sound bite but lacks sincerity and substance" given Marcos Jr.'s refusal to acknowledge abuses under his father's rule. Millions of Filipinos converged in February 1986 at the highway to shield top military and defense officials who defected from Marcos' administration. The ailing president, who imposed martial rule from 1972 to 1981, was driven with his family and cronies into U.S. exile. The uprising became a harbinger of change in authoritarian regimes. But in the nearly four decades since then, poverty, stark inequality between the rich and poor and a failure to address past wrongdoings have remained deeply entrenched, fanning political and social divisions. The Marcoses returned to the Philippines in 1991 and gradually regained political power despite the plunder and widespread human rights atrocities four decades ago.

Hong Kong model's in-laws charged after body parts found

HONG KONG (AP)—Police in Hong Kong filed murder charges against the former father-in-law and brother-in-law of a model and influencer whose body parts were found in a refrigerator and a skull believed to be hers in a pot at a rural house. Authorities also arrested Abby Choi's ex-husband on Saturday and charged him with murder on Sunday night, Superintendent Alan Chung said. He will appear in court Monday alongside three family members: Choi's former father-in-law and his eldest son were charged with murder, while her former mother-in-law faces a count of perverting the course of justice, police said in a statement. The names of those accused have not been released. Choi, 28, had financial disputes involving tens of millions of Hong Kong dollars with her ex-husband and his family, Chung said earlier, adding that "some people" were unhappy with how Choi handled her financial assets. Choi was a model and influencer who shared her glamorous life of photo shoots and fashion shows with more than 100,000 followers on Instagram. Dressed in a tulle floor-length gown, she had just attended a Dior show at Paris Fashion Week. Her last post was a week ago, featuring a photoshoot she had done with L'Officiel Monaco, a fashion publication. Choi had been missing several days when police discovered her dismembered body and documents on Friday. The remains were stored in a refrigerator in the home in the village of Tai Po, a suburban part of Hong Kong closer to the border with mainland China.

World

On the Ukraine front, civilians cling on as troops repel Russia

AP

Emilia Budskaya, a local resident who decided to stay in the city breaks dead tree branches to heat her basement in the frontline city of Vuhledar, Ukraine, Saturday, Feb. 25, 2023.

VUHLEDAR, Ukraine (AP)—The murky water oh so slowly trickles from the filthy drainpipe into her grimy container—the ticking seconds ramping up the risk that Emilia Budskaya could lose life or limb to Russian artillery strikes torturing her front-line town in eastern Ukraine.

Gaping gashes from shrapnel in the courtyard walls around her testify to the dangers of venturing outside — exposed and without the body armor that Ukrainian soldiers defending Vuhledar wear when they emerge from their bunkers.

But Budskaya and her daughter need water to cling on and survive, to eke out another day in the ruins.

And so they wait—tick, tick, tick—for the container to fill, for Budskaya to then pour the water into plastic bottles and—tick, tick, tick—or her to then start the process again until their bottles are filled.

Picking their way through the debris and mud, they carry their bounty back to the dark basement that now passes for their home.

"We have no water, nothing," Budskaya says. "I'm getting rain water to wash dishes and hands."

On the largely static front line between Ukrainian and Russian forces that stretches over hundreds of kilometers (miles), from the Black Sea in the south to Ukraine's northeastern border with Russia, Vuhledar has become one of the deadliest hot spots.

It has joined Bakhmut, Marinka and other cities and towns, particularly in fiercely contested eastern Ukraine, as evidence of a grinding and destructive war of attrition, as well as symbols of fierce Ukrainian resistance.

By defending their ruins, Ukrainian forces are slowing costly Russian offensive efforts to extend Moscow's control over the entirety of eastern Ukraine's industrial Donbas region. It became Russian President Vladimir Putin's revised target for conquest after his forces were beaten back from the capital, Kyiv, and northern Ukraine in the invasion's opening stage a year ago.

Iraqi president says country now peaceful, life is returning

BAGHDAD (AP)—Nearly 20 years after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein by U.S.-led forces, Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid wants the world to know his country now is at peace, democratic and intent on rebuilding economic life while maintaining a government that serves the whole country and the region.

Rashid told The Associated Press on Sunday that after overcoming the hardships of the past two decades, Iraq is ready to focus on improving everyday life for its people. Those hardships included years of resistance to foreign troops, violence between Sunnis and Shiites, and attacks by Islamic State group extremists who once controlled large areas, including Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul.

"Peace and security is all over the country, and I would be very glad if you will report that and emphasize on that, instead of giving a picture of Iraq ... still (as) a war zone, which a lot of media still do," Rashid said.

While Iraq's major fighting has ended, there have been some recent outbreaks of violence — including on the day of Rashid's election, which came after a yearlong stalemate following the October 2021 election. Ahead of the vote, at least nine rockets targeted Iraq's Parliament inside Baghdad's fortified Green Zone.

After Rashid's election, he nominated Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, who formed a government with the backing of a coalition of Iran-backed parties and with promises of improving security and public services.

Despite its oil wealth, Iraq's infrastructure remains weak. Private generators fill in for the hours of daily state electricity cuts. Long-promised public transportation projects, including a Baghdad metro, have not come to fruition.

Rashid said this is due to damage as "a result of conflicts and as a result of terror, as a result of a number of years living at war."

Government critics say the sputtering electricity supply is also a result of endemic corruption, rooted in the country's sectarian power-sharing system that allows political elites to use patronage networks to consolidate power.

Rashid, who spoke at his presidential quarters in Saddam's former palace, also asserted that most Iraqis believe the 2003 invasion of Saddam-ruled Iraq by the United States and its allies was necessary because of the former dictator's brutality.

Overdrive

Lexus shows out with RX500 hybrid

By MARC D. GRASSO
BOSTON HERALD

MARC GRASSO/BOSTON HERALD/TNS
Lexus RX500 was ready for an overhaul, and it got it.

Full size upscale SUV and a Copper exterior—what a match!

With the variety of upscale SUVs on the market today, manufacturers are in a wrestling match to try and beat their competition. Toyota's upscale brand, Lexus, is just like the rest, as its redesign efforts are now in full force with the recently released RX500h. Similar to the past generation RX350, which has always been Lexus' most popular vehicle, the time has come.

Our pre-production RX500h tester came in a gorgeous Copper exterior paired with 21-inch 10-spoke matte black alloy wheels. With its new front fascia design, it's no secret that this as a hybrid. It shows out nicely with updated curves and interior updates similar to its NX sibling.

A 2.4-liter Turbo Hybrid engine shows the way producing 366 horsepower and 406 pound-feet of torque. It seemed sluggish at times, but with the hybrid system, it really had the torque needed to get up and go.

"The new RX's style upgrades and hybrid drivetrains may garner the most attention, but it's the technology upgrades that most owners will appreciate," said Karl Brauer, iSeeCars.com executive analyst. "Big changes, like the larger touchscreen and improved user interface—hurray for the removal of the touchpad—finally give the RX a modern feel, while the Google-based operating system expands functionality and provides personalization for multiple drivers. Sure, the hybrid drivetrains are a proper nod to the electrification narrative dominating the industry right now … but the non-hybrid RX is the lightest model, and that's reflected in its superior dynamics versus the electrified versions. While the RX500h boasts the highest power, it's also the heaviest model, and those extra 500+ pounds hurt both fuel efficiency, acceleration and handling."

For me, the color was fantastic and the updates were really nice. I enjoyed the comfort, the infotainment and the ride height of the new RX. For Lexus, this vehicle's success is really important, and I think consumers will recognize its value and exclusive appearance.

NUTS & BOLTS

- **2023 Lexus RX500h**
- **MSRP:** $61,600
- **Price as tested:** $70,620
- **Mileage:** 27 mpg city/28 mpg highway/27.2 mpg as tested

2023 CX-50 is mid-size Mazda commuter fun

By MARC D. GRASSO
BOSTON HERALD

MEDIANEWS GROUP/BOSTON HERALD/TNS
The Mazda CX-50 is designed for that every day commuter.

Welcome Back Mazda, it's been too long!

In Grasso's Garage this week, we enjoyed Mazda's recent release of the 2023 CX-50. Born in the SUV class, the CX range is commuter-engaged fun with limited frills and thrills. The 5 seater CX-50 is specifically designed for the everyday commuter.

Wrapped in Machine Gray Metallic, the CX-50 is spacious for the driver and passengers alike. Its lackluster infotainment system is typical of Mazda. Protruding from the center dash, it's just large enough to see without obscuring your view. Powering the 10.25 inch infotainment operation is a center console dial, allowing you to keep your eyes on the road while operating. The volume knob is conveniently located in the center console.

Our 2.5L Turbo charged Premium Plus AWD tester was flawless. It had tons of get up and go, excellent ride quality and nice styling. With 227 horsepower and 310 pound-feet of torque, the CX-50 means business. We liked that the six-speed automatic transmission still had a shifter as well as option manual when pushed over like past vehicle models. Twenty-inch wheels, leather seats, sunroof, ventilated and heated seats, SiriusXM, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto were also a few items that came standard in our tester. Over a week of highway, city and long distance driving, the CX-50 did great on all terrains, and mileage came in at a commendable 25.7 mpg. I would like to have seen more legroom width in the front seats, but I am not complaining at all.

Mazda manufactures realistic automobiles for realistic consumers. Well priced and well designed, the CX-50 has a place in Grasso's Garage.

NUTS & BOLTS

- **MSRP:** $42,350
- **MPG:** 23 city / 29 highway / 25.7 as tested
- **As Tested:** $44,750

Do I really need an oil change?

Q: I have a 2007 Honda Civic EX with 22,365 miles on it. The owner's manual says to change the oil when the dashboard indicator displays 15% oil life, and the indicator has never gone below 80%. Yet every year the dealer tells me that the oil needs to be changed on an annual basis, period. And every year the dealer finds hundreds of dollars of fixes that need to be done. Does that seem reasonable? And even given the age of the car, should I really be taking it in every year for a checkup, if I'm not having any problems?

P.R., Chicago

A: I preach the gospel of following the oil life monitor—most of the time. If your owner's manual calls for an annual oil change, do it. Short trips allow contaminants to build up, which causes the oil to degrade—even without driving.

■■■

Q: I loved riding in my mom's yellow VW Beetle. I especially liked the side vent window. My Subaru Forester has that section of window for more unobstructed viewing and it would be great if they were to make it a vent. Why don't car makers consider bringing back that feature?

P.A., Elmwood Park, Illinois

A: The vent helped remove interior fog from the windows. Air conditioning in all cars now does the job. It probably saves carmakers a couple bucks, too.

■■■

Q: I've been following what you said in recent columns about making sure your tires are inflated to what the auto manufacturer says on the door sticker. But what if I do keep them inflated to the max PSI listed on the tire? I drive a 2011 Toyota Sienna. I would think that more air could only help the mileage. Am I risking a blowout?

M.V., Chicago

A: Radial tires' inflation—either underinflated or overinflated—can't be determined simply by looking at them. The diameter remains more or less the same. You wouldn't get better fuel economy or risk a blowout, but you would surely get a rougher ride.

■■■

Q: For many years white wall tires were the most popular and most expensive tires you could buy and I can't believe they have fallen out of favor in today's world. Can you even purchase them anymore? Do you know why they never came back to popularity in today's world?

J.F., The Villages, Florida

A: I don't know why white walls went out of favor. Your local retail tire store may not carry them, but you can still find some on the internet. But there is another option. When I was in high school, I used to install Port-a-Walls on tires for a used car dealer. They are fake white walls that cover the tire's original sidewall to dress them up.

MOTORMOUTH

By BOB WEBER
Tribune News Service

Bob Weber is a writer and mechanic who became an ASE-certified Master Automobile Technician in 1976. Weber's work has appeared in professional trade magazines and various consumer publications including Consumer Guide and Consumers Digest. Send questions along with name and town to motormouth.tribune@gmail.com.

Life & Style

‘Everything Everywhere All at Once’ dominates at SAG Awards

By JAKE COYLE
AP FILM WRITER

JORDAN STRAUSS/INVISION/AP

From back left, Harry Shum Jr., Jenny Slate, Tallie Medel, Ke Huy Quan, Stephanie Hsu, Michelle Yeoh, Brian Le, Andy Le, from front left, James Hong and Jamie Lee Curtis pose with the award for outstanding performance by a cast in a motion pictures for “Everything Everywhere All at Once,” in the press room at the 29th annual Screen Actors Guild Awards on Sunday, Feb. 26, 2023, at the Fairmont Century Plaza in Los Angeles.

The unlikely awards season juggernaut “Everything Everywhere All at Once” marched on at the Screen Actors Guild Awards on Sunday, and even gathered stream with wins not just for best ensemble, Michelle Yeoh and Ke Huy Quan but also for Jamie Lee Curtis.

The SAG Awards, often an Oscar preview, threw some curve balls into the Oscars race in a ceremony streamed lived on Netflix’s YouTube page from Fairmont Century Plaza in Los Angeles.

But the clearest result of the SAG Awards was the overwhelming success of Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert’s madcap multiverse tale, which has now used its hotdog fingers to snag top honors from the acting, directing and producing guilds. Only one film (“Apollo 13”) had won all three and not gone on to win best picture at the Oscars.

After so much of the cast of “Everything Everywhere All at Once” had already been on the stage to accept awards, the night’s final moment belonged to 94-year-old James Hong, a supporting player in the film and a trailblazer for Asian American representation in Hollywood. He brought up the ignoble yellowface history of the 1937 film “The Good Earth.”

“The leading role was played with these guys with their eyes taped up like this and they talked like this because the producers said the Asians were not good enough and they were not box office,” said Hong. “But look at us now!”

Hong added that the cast of “Everything Everywhere All at Once” wasn’t all Chinese, though he granted Jamie Lee Curtis had a good Chinese name. Curtis’ win was one of the most surprising of the night, coming over the longtime favorite, Angela Bassett (“Black Panther: Wakanda Forever”), who had seemed to be on a clear path to becoming the first actor to win an Oscar for a performance in a Marvel movie.

A visibly moved Curtis said she was wearing the wedding ring her father, Tony Curtis, gave her mother, Janet Leigh.

“I know you look at me and think ‘Nepo baby,’” said Curtis, who won in her first SAG nomination. “But the truth of the matter is that I’m 64 years old and this is just amazing.”

The actors guild, though, lent some clarity to the lead categories. Though some have seen best actress as a toss up between Yeoh and BAFTA winner Cate Blanchett (“Tár”), Yeoh again took home the award for best female lead performance.

“This is not just for me,” said Yeoh, the first Asian actress to win the SAG Award for female lead. “It’s for every little girl that looks like me.”

Quan, the former child star, also won for best supporting male actor. The “Everything Everywhere All at Once” costar had left acting for years after auditions dried up. He’s also the first Asian to win best male supporting actor at the SAG Awards.

“When I stepped away from acting, it was because there were so few opportunities,” said Quan. “Now, tonight we are celebrating James Hong, Michelle Yeoh, Stephanie Hsu, Hong Chau, Harry Shum Jr. The landscape looks so different now.”

Some online commentators suggested there was irony in Mark Wahlberg, who presented best ensemble, handing out the night’s final award to a film with a predominantly Asian and Asian American cast. In 1988, a 16-year-old Wahlberg attacked two Vietnamese men while trying to steal beer near his home in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Wahlberg, who said race wasn’t a factor in the assault, served 45 days of a two-year sentence. Wahlberg also announced the film “Women Talking” as “Women Are Talking.”

Best actor has been one of the hardest races to call. Austin Butler (“Elvis”), Brendan Fraser (“The Whale”) and Colin Farrell (“The Banshees of Inisherin”) have all been seen as possible winners. But it was Fraser who went home with the SAG Award for his comeback performance as an obese shut-in in “The Whale.”

“Believe me, if you just stay in there and put one foot in front of the other, you’ll get where you need to go,” said Fraser, who anxiously eyed the actor-shaped trophy and left the stage saying he was going to go look for some pants for him.

The SAG Awards are considered one of the most reliable Oscar bellwethers. Actors make up the biggest percentage of the film academy, so their choices have the largest sway. Last year, “CODA” triumphed at SAG before winning best picture at the Oscar s, while Ariana DeBose, Will Smith, Jessica Chastain and Troy Kotsur all won at a SAG Award before taking home an Academy Award.

Father and son are tired of hearing about their height

DEAR ABBY: My husband is 6 feet, 6 inches tall. My 19-year-old son is taller, at 6 feet, 7 inches. They loathe being asked how tall they are. There are times when they are proud of their height and others when they have felt self-conscious because it can be uncomfortable to “tower” over others.

Often, the question is asked in a tone that conveys the person perceives them as some kind of “freak of nature.” They have been told they “must have been really well-fed growing up,” or the commenters are “so glad they never had to pay THEIR food bills.” And, of course, the assumption is that they played basketball—which they both did. But imagine if they didn’t or hated the game.

They have had it with these insensitive, intrusive comments. While I, someone of average height, think a commenter may just be trying to make conversation—and height is a respected attribute—it’s nonetheless offensive. My son or husband would never ask anyone in retort, “How short are you?” or “How much do you weigh?”

Why do people think that questions about how tall someone is don’t fall into the same category? What’s an appropriate response when the person asking makes you out to be some kind of freak?

TALL PERSON SYMPATHIZER

DEAR SYMPATHIZER: Sometimes people, without intending to be rude, blurt out the first thing that comes into their heads, and height is hard to miss. This isn’t the first time I have been told that some tall individuals are self-conscious about it.

A social group called Tall Clubs International was formed many years ago so they could socialize without feeling self-conscious. (Today’s generations are taller by several inches than they were 100 years ago, and tourists visiting European museums have been shocked at the diminutive size of the suits of armor.)

While all of us can have a bad day, I think the best way for your son and your husband to handle these questions would be to hang onto their sense of humor and answer them honestly.

■■■■

DEAR ABBY: My man and I have been together for two years. He has his own place, and I have mine. We really enjoy each other’s company. I have a 13-year-old daughter. The issue is, we haven’t been out on a real date since we’ve been together. (I understand that the pandemic had an impact on this.) I feel, at some point, something’s got to give. I have mentioned it to him a few times already. What’s a woman like me to do?

HOMEBOUND IN UPSTATE NEW YORK

DEAR HOMEBOUND: If you want a mate who is a self-starter, this person isn’t it. A woman “like you” should make the plans, tell her man where they are going and what they’ll be doing and what time to pick her up for that date. If, after two years of expressing what you would like, your message still hasn’t gotten through, please understand this will probably be the pattern for the rest of your relationship.

■■■■

Good advice for everyone – teens to seniors – is in “The Anger in All of Us and How to Deal With It.” To order, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Anger Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

DEAR ABBY

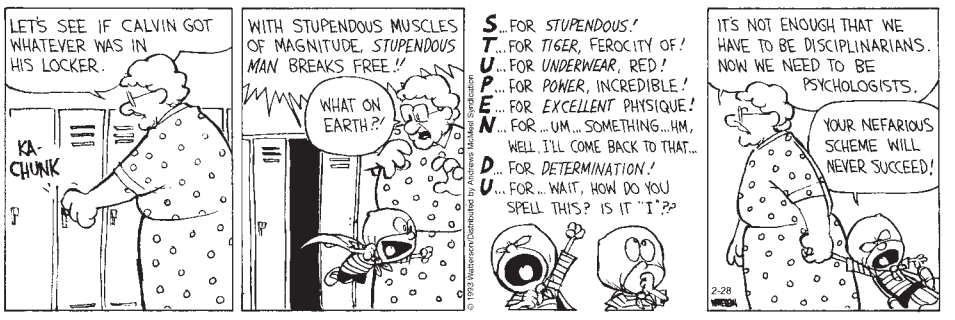
By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson


LET'S SEE IF CALVIN GOT WHATEVER WAS IN HIS LOCKER.
KA-CHUNK
WITH STUPENDOUS MUSCLES OF MAGNITUDE, STUPENDOUS MAN BREAKS FREE!!
WHAT ON EARTH?!
S... FOR STUPENDOUS!
T... FOR TIGER, FEROCITY OF!
U... FOR UNDERWEAR, RED!
P... FOR POWER, INCREDIBLE!
E... FOR EXCELLENT PHYSIQUE!
N... FOR ... UM ... SOMETHING ... HM, WELL, I'LL COME BACK TO THAT...
D... FOR DETERMINATION!
U... FOR ... WAIT, HOW DO YOU SPELL THIS? IS IT "I"?
IT'S NOT ENOUGH THAT WE HAVE TO BE DISCIPLINARIANS. NOW WE NEED TO BE PSYCHOLOGISTS.
YOUR NEFARIOUS SCHEME WILL NEVER SUCCEED!
© 1993 Watterson/Distributed by Andrews McMeel Syndication
2-28

Garfield®

By Jim Davis

THOUGHT I HEARD A ROAST BEEF SANDWICH
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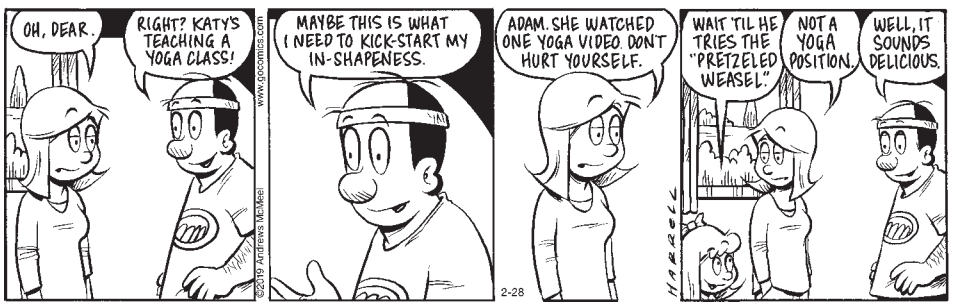
JIM DAVIS 2-28

Adam@home

By Bryan Basset


OH, DEAR.
RIGHT? KATY'S TEACHING A YOGA CLASS!
MAYBE THIS IS WHAT I NEED TO KICK-START MY IN-SHAPENESS.
ADAM. SHE WATCHED ONE YOGA VIDEO. DON'T HURT YOURSELF.
WAIT 'TIL HE TRIES THE "PRETZELED WEASEL."
NOT A YOGA POSITION.
WELL, IT SOUNDS DELICIOUS.
©2019 Andrews McMeel
www.gocomics.com
2-28

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy

Well, ALL THE TESTS CAME BACK NEGATIVE.
FRANKLY, I'M STUMPED.
So WHEN DID YOU FIRST START NOTICING THIS TUNNEL VISION?
GLENN MCCOY
2-28

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Totals
5 Priestly vestments
9 Aachen article
12 Prudish
13 Self-referential
14 Citric beverage
15 Colorful reef swimmer
17 Free (of)
18 Goals
19 Queried
21 2023 memoir by Prince Harry
24 Met solo
25 Drei minus zwei
26 Dogpatch resident
30 Ryan of "Top Gun"
31 Resurrected
32 Miracle-—
33 Repeats
35 Gels
36 Mandolin's kin
37 CBS founder
38 Old anesthetic
40 Play opener
42 24 horas
43 Uriel, for one
48 Blackbird
49 Apple center
50 Empty truck's weight
51 Sea, to Henri
52 Pitcher
53 Blind part

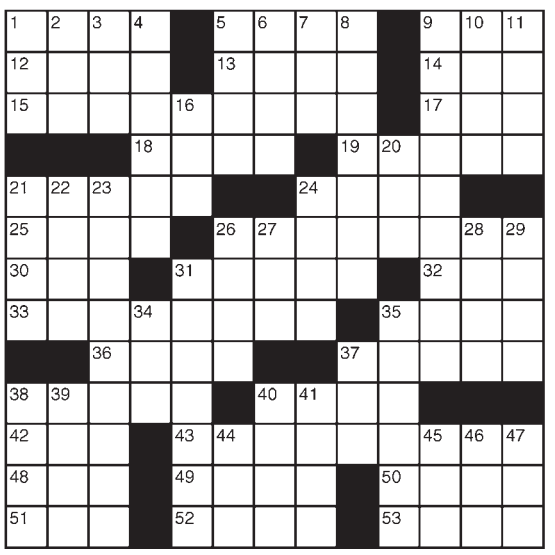
DOWN

1 "Me time" resort
2 Coffee vessel
3 Russian jet
4 Mascara mishaps
5 Like most car radios
6 Maui garlands
7 "Butter" K-pop band
8 Desert-like
9 Jessica Alba TV series
10 Actress Falco
11 Sitcom star Foxx
16 Fib
20 Bro or sis
21 Big rig
22 Painter Mondrian
23 Pasta variety
24 Pub orders
26 Low-calorie
27 British verb ending
28 Art Deco master
29 Optimistic
31 Hectic routine
34 Street, in Montreal
35 Virtuous types
37 School org.
38 Dutch cheese
39 Fork part
40 Estate measure
41 "Mask" actress
44 Tier
45 Lass
46 Mound stat
47 Allow

Solution time: 22 mins.

A	L	E	X	■	A	L	F	■	Y	O	R	E
R	O	M	A	N	C	E	R	■	E	V	I	L
C	O	I	N	C	I	D	E	■	M	E	N	S
■	■	■	A	I	D	■	E	M	E	R	G	E
C	H	A	D	S	■	F	R	A	N	■	■	■
H	U	L	U	■	O	L	I	V	I	E	R	■
I	M	A	■	I	P	A	D	S	■	R	U	M
■	P	R	O	T	E	G	E	■	L	I	S	A
■	■	■	B	O	N	G	■	W	A	K	E	D
M	E	L	L	O	W	■	B	O	P	■	■	■
O	L	I	O	■	I	R	O	N	S	I	D	E
B	A	R	N	■	D	I	O	G	E	N	E	S
S	N	A	G	■	E	O	N	■	S	E	E	P

Yesterday's answer 2-28



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955**! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Jason Aldean, 46; Ali Larter, 47; Eric Lindros, 50; Pat Monahan, 54.

Happy Birthday: Take pride in what you do for others, and you will be offered the same courtesy in return. Step outside your comfort zone if it will help you bring about positive change. Charm and hands-on help will result in a successful transition to what you want to do next. Emotional confusion is likely; ask questions and avoid drama. Your numbers are 9, 15, 22, 28, 32, 37, 45.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19):* Play to win. The more beguiling you are, the more interest you'll receive. A chance to up your game or meet someone who can help you get ahead is in the stars. Set up meetings and attend reunions, and something extraordinary will unfold. ✪✪✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20):* Don't make promises until you understand what you will have to deliver and that it's in your power to do so. Letting what someone says intimidate you will weaken your position. Being observant, direct and knowledgeable will help you gain trust and respect. ✪✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20):* Put your plans in motion. Think matters through, precisely execute what you want to achieve and pull in experts to ensure things get done right the first time. Reconnect with someone you miss. A romantic gesture will help you decide what's next. ✪✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22):* Someone will try to charm you into something you probably shouldn't consider. When in doubt, ask an expert in order to avoid a mistake or loss. Pay attention to the changes others make, and counter anything that might jeopardize your goal. ✪✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22):* Get together with someone you enjoy working alongside. You'll find it easy to pick up where you left off and drum up interest regarding something you want to pursue. With the right people, success will follow. Lead the way and reap the rewards. ✪✪✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22):* Change begins with you. Do not wait or depend on others when you want things done a certain way. Take care of what's important to you before anyone can interfere. Working alone will allow you to be a perfectionist. ✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22):* Get out, explore what life can offer and discover something that excites you. Gather information and follow your heart. Finding the path that brings you joy and pays for your desired lifestyle is crucial to achieving peace of mind. ✪✪✪✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21):* Offering embellished information will put you in a precarious position when it comes time to deliver. Make sure you can live up to your promises or debt before you pledge. Handle your finances carefully and find ways to cut corners. ✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21):* Someone colorful and charming will take advantage of you if you are naive or too trusting. Do your homework, ask pertinent questions and verify facts before you say yes to someone or something that can squander your time, money or freedom. ✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19):* Have fun with your peers. By mixing business with pleasure, you'll win over someone who is strategically beneficial when you need a favor. Keep your money safe, and prepare to declutter and sell what you no longer need. ✪✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18):* Spend more time at home, and you'll accomplish more than anticipated. Work diligently to get your house in order and lower your overhead. Once you feel comfortable with your surroundings and financial situation, everything else will fall into place. ✪✪✪✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20):* Don't share secrets or gossip. Focus on improvements and applying your skills to something that makes you feel good. Don't fold under pressure or let someone take advantage of you. Dump what drags you down and replace it with what brings you joy. ✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are creative, fashionable and resourceful. You are flexible and responsible.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

1					3			7
5			4	6			9	
		9				3		8
	1		2		6			
7			1	3	4	6		
6		3	5	8			1	
8			3	4			7	
			6		5			
3	2	1		7	9	4	5	6

Difficulty: ★★ 2-28

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Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

3	8	6	1	7	9	4	5	2
1	9	7	2	5	4	8	3	6
4	2	5	8	3	6	7	1	9
6	5	3	7	8	1	2	9	4
2	7	8	9	4	3	5	6	1
9	4	1	6	2	5	3	7	8
5	6	4	3	1	2	9	8	7
7	3	9	4	6	8	1	2	5
8	1	2	5	9	7	6	4	3

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Difficulty: ★★★★ 2-24

WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the **WONDERWORD.**

LOVE YOUR PET! **Solution: 5 letters**

C	A	R	E	E	B	S	I	R	F	R	I	E	N	D
H	C	H	E	R	I	S	H	C	A	E	B	E	O	Y
A	O	E	C	A	R	B	M	E	L	I	T	N	U	H
R	M	E	L	I	M	S	R	T	R	T	A	K	T	T
I	P	E	L	E	S	A	R	D	I	T	E	T	D	A
T	A	K	O	G	B	U	S	K	E	E	R	G	O	P
Y	N	I	U	B	T	R	I	T	S	E	T	E	O	M
M	I	H	I	T	E	N	A	D	A	Y	R	N	R	E
U	O	T	P	P	D	I	N	T	X	F	A	U	S	X
I	N	O	M	N	C	A	Ⓢ	Y	E	A	I	I	K	E
R	D	A	E	E	E	Ⓨ	A	T	R	A	L	N	C	R
A	P	S	R	D	Ⓞ	R	C	A	L	O	C	E	I	C
U	S	P	I	Ⓣ	N	H	E	I	V	O	M	H	R	I
Q	P	H	E	A	R	T	C	U	D	D	L	E	T	S
A	F	F	E	C	T	I	O	N	O	I	T	O	M	E

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Adopt, Affection, Appreciate, Aquarium, Beach, Birds, Care, Celebrate, Charity, Cherish, Companion, Cuddle, Donate, Embrace, Emotion, Empathy, Exercise, Fetch, Friend, Frisbee, Genuine, Heart, Hide and Seek, Hike, Hugs, Kindness, Kitten, Memory, Movie, Outdoors, Pamper, Rabbit, Relax, Smile, Teach, Toys, Trail, Treats, Tricks, Turtle, Yarn

Yesterday's Answer: Choice

The NEW **Volume 70** can be purchased online at www.WonderWordBooks.com, or call 1-800-642-6480.

Lillard sets Blazers records with 71 points, 13 3s in win

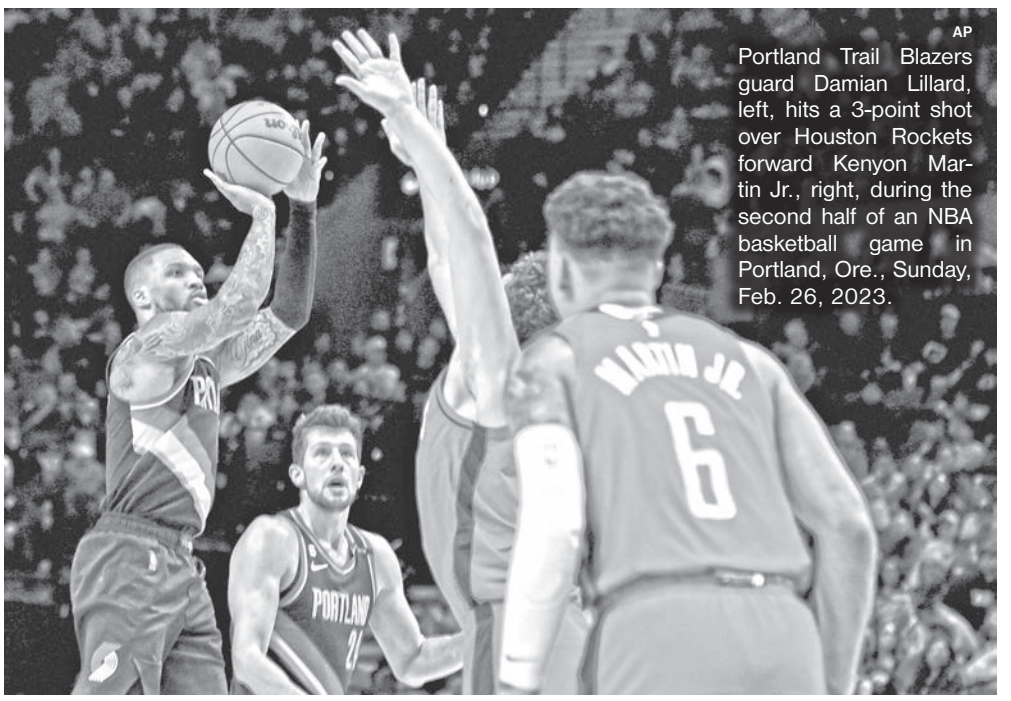
PORTLAND, Ore. (AP)—Damian Lillard set franchise and career highs with 71 points—tied for the most in the NBA this season—and 13 3-pointers and the Portland Trail Blazers snapped a two-game skid with a 131-114 victory over the Houston Rockets on Sunday night.

Lillard tied Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell for the most points in a game this season after Mitchell also scored 71 in a win over Chicago on Jan. 2. Lillard broke his own franchise mark of 61 points, which he'd done twice, on a 3-pointer with 4:42 left that also topped his career record for 3s in a game with 11.

Lillard's 13 3-pointers were one shy of the NBA record set by Golden State's Klay Thompson in 2018. Thompson's Warriors teammate Stephen Curry (2016) and Chicago's Zach LaVine (2019) also made 13 3s.

Lillard left the game with 44 seconds left, tied with Mitchell, Elgin Baylor (1960) and David Robinson (1994) for the eighth-most points scored in a game in NBA history. Wilt Chamberlain has the league record with 100 for Philadelphia against New York on March 2, 1962, at Hershey, Pennsylvania.

Alperen Sengun had 17 points and 10 rebounds for the Rockets, sitting in last place in the Western Conference with just 13 overall wins and nine straight losses.



AP

Portland Trail Blazers guard Damian Lillard, left, hits a 3-point shot over Houston Rockets forward Kenyon Martin Jr., right, during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Portland, Ore., Sunday, Feb. 26, 2023.

BUCKS 104, SUNS 101

MILWAUKEE (AP)—Jrue Holiday scored 33 points, Brook Lopez made a tiebreaking layup with 24.8 seconds left and Milwaukee edged Phoenix for its 14th consecutive victory.

The nationally televised game didn't include Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo or Phoenix's Kevin Durant.

Antetokounmpo was out with a bruised right quadriceps after leaving in the first quarter of the Bucks' 128-99 victory over the Miami Heat on Friday. Durant has yet to appear in a game for the Suns and hasn't played since Jan. 8 because of sprained right medial collateral ligament.

Lopez had 22 points and 12 rebounds for the Bucks, and Khris Middleton added 11 points and 10 rebounds.

Devin Booker scored 24 points, Deandre Ayton had 22 and Chris Paul added 18 for Phoenix. Ayton also had 11 rebounds.

LAKERS 111, MAVERICKS 108

DALLAS (AP)—Anthony Davis had 30 points and 15 rebounds, including a putback dunk for the late lead, and Los Angeles erased a 27-point deficit to beat Dallas.

LeBron James scored 26 points as the Lakers won their fourth in five games by turning a showcase of stars from a laugher into a thriller that featured 13 lead changes in the fourth quarter.

Luka Doncic scored 26 points for the Mavs, but the youngest of the four superstars was limited and frustrated after a 14-point first quarter that sent Dallas on its way to the huge lead.

Kyrie Irving had 21 points and 11 rebounds for Dallas, but didn't take over in the fourth quarter the way he did in his first victory with Doncic since the trade from Brooklyn—over lowly San Antonio.

HAWKS 129, NETS 127

ATLANTA (AP)—Trae Young sank a buzzer-beating jumper over Spencer Dinwiddie to lift Atlanta over Brooklyn a few hours before the Hawks announced they hired Quin Snyder to replace the fired Nate McMillan as coach.

Young finished with 34 points for the Hawks, who recovered after blowing an 18-point lead to overcome four Nets scorers with at least 20 points.

Cam Johnson had 27 points for Brooklyn, including a 3-pointer from the corner to tie it at 127 with 7.8 seconds remaining. Mikal Bridges scored 24 for the Nets, who have lost four of five. Cam Thomas added 22 points and Dinwiddie had 20.

Dejounte Murray scored 28 points and Bogdan Bogdanovic added 22 for Atlanta, which won its second consecutive game under interim coach Joe Prunty after McMillan was fired Tuesday.

NUGGETS 134, CLIPPERS 124, OT

DENVER (AP)—Nikola Jokic had 40 points, 17 rebounds and 10 assists to lead Denver to an overtime victory against Los Angeles in a matchup of Western Conference contenders.

Paul George nearly won it for the Clippers with an incredible shot at the end of regulation, but his long heave from just in front of the 3-point line in the backcourt came just after the buzzer.

It was the 23rd triple-double of the season for Jokic and his 14th in the past 19 games. Denver is undefeated this season when he has a triple-double.

Michael Porter Jr. had 29 points and 11 rebounds for the Nuggets. Jamal Murray added 21 points and 12 assists.

Kawhi Leonard had 33 points to pace the Clippers.

BULLS 102, WIZARDS 82

CHICAGO (AP)—DeMar DeRozan scored 29 points, Zach LaVine added 27 and Chicago overcame its shooting woes from long range to beat Washington.

Alex Caruso and LaVine each sank 3-pointers midway through the third quarter to turn a one-point deficit into a 57-52 lead the Bulls wouldn't relinquish. Before the consecutive 3s, the Bulls converted only one of their first 16 3-point attempts.

The Bulls won their second game in a row after losing six straight to close the first half of the season. They finished shooting 8 of 30 from 3-point range, while the Wizards shot only 6 of 28 from long range.

Bradley Beal scored 18 points for the Wizards (28-32), who lost their second consecutive game. They played without forward-center Kristaps Porzingis (sore left knee) and guard Monte Morris (sore lower back).

CAVALIERS 118, RAPTORS 93

CLEVELAND (AP)—Donovan Mitchell scored 35 points and Jarrett Allen had 23 points and 11 rebounds, sending Cleveland past Toronto.

Mitchell made eight 3-pointers—one shy of his career high—and had six rebounds and four assists in 31 minutes as the Cavaliers snapped their three-game losing streak and remained fourth in the Eastern Conference.

Darius Garland added 18 points and 11 assists, and Evan Mobley had 18 points and nine rebounds for Cleveland, which improved to 26-7 at home this season.

Pascal Siakam paced Toronto with 25 points and grabbed eight rebounds, and Jakob Poeltl had 13 points and nine boards. Starting point guard Fred VanVleet missed his third straight game for personal reasons.

KINGS 124, THUNDER 115

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP)—De'Aaron Fox had 33 points and eight assists and Sacramento defeated short-handed Oklahoma City.

Keegan Murray scored 20 points and Domantas Sabonis added 14 points, 15 rebounds and eight assists for the Kings, who won their third straight. Sacramento defeated the Los Angeles Clippers 176-175 in two overtimes Friday night in the second highest-scoring game in NBA history. The Kings followed it by shooting 52.9% from the field against the Thunder.

Isaiah Joe scored 24 points and Lu Dort and Josh Giddey each added 18 for Oklahoma City. The Thunder have lost all three of their games since the All-Star break.

Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander sat out with right ankle soreness and an abdominal strain. The All-Star leads the Thunder with 31 points per game.

WARRIORS 109, TIMBERWOLVES 104

SAN FRANCISCO (AP)—Klay Thompson scored 32 points, including a key 3-pointer with 2:05 to play, and Golden State held off Minnesota.

Donte DiVincenzo put Golden State ahead for good on a 3 with 3:02 left and finished with 21 points, eight rebounds and five assists. He also won a jump ball in the final minute.

Kevon Looney grabbed 17 rebounds and has 13 or more in six consecutive games. He finished with 12 points, and his career-best sixth game in a row with double-digit boards was much-needed for a Warriors team still playing without three starters: Stephen Curry, Draymond Green and Andrew Wiggins.

Naz Reid scored a career-high 30 points and added nine rebounds for Minnesota, but the Timberwolves have lost three straight and four of five.

Hawks hire Snyder as coach to replace fired McMillan

ATLANTA (AP)—Quin Snyder has been hired as coach of the Atlanta Hawks to replace the fired Nate McMillan, the team announced Sunday.

The Hawks reached an agreement with Snyder on a five-year deal only five days after firing McMillan on Tuesday. The team has scheduled a news conference for Monday to introduce Snyder.

The announcement from the team Sunday came shortly after the Hawks' second straight win under interim coach Joe Prunty, a buzzer-beating 129-127 win over the Brooklyn Nets.

When announcing McMillan's firing, general manager Landry Fields stressed that Atlanta's eighth-place standing in the Eastern Conference was not acceptable for a team that advanced to the conference finals in 2021. On Wednesday, Fields confirmed Snyder was a candidate.

Because Snyder, 56, was available, the agreement to return to Atlanta, where he was an assistant on Mike Budenholzer's staff during the 2013-14 season, was reached quickly.

The decision to fire McMillan at the All-Star break allowed Fields to negotiate exclusively with Snyder. Had Fields waited until after the season, other teams might have had interest in Snyder.

"From our first conversation, it was clear that Quin had all the characteristics we were looking for in our next head coach," Fields said in a statement released by the team. "He has both an incredible basketball and emotional IQ, and we share the same core values and basketball philosophies of having honest communication and collaboration with players, tremendous attention to detail and placing a great emphasis on player development."

Snyder said he's "thrilled to go back to Atlanta."

"I am excited to collaborate with Landry to create a successful program that devoted Hawks fans are proud of and cheer for and am grateful to Tony, Jami and the Ressler family for this opportunity," Snyder said in the team's statement. "My family and I are looking forward to immersing ourselves in the community and calling Atlanta home."

Snyder was coach of the Utah Jazz from the 2014-15 to 2021-22 seasons, accumulating a 372-264 record and leading the team to the playoffs in six of his eight seasons.

McMillan went 99-80 as Atlanta's coach, including a 27-11 record as interim in the second half of the 2020-21 season. His success that season in leading Atlanta to the Eastern Conference finals earned him the full-time position.

McMillan was unable to follow up on the 2021 postseason success.

The Hawks finished 43-39 in the 2021-22 season and, after escaping the play-in tournament, lost to the Miami Heat 4-1 in the first round of the Eastern Conference playoffs.

The pressure on McMillan to guide the Hawks closer to the top of the conference increased this season. The team's win-now approach became more clear when Danilo Gallinari and three first-round picks were traded to the San Antonio Spurs for All-Star guard Dejounte Murray.

The trade formed a backcourt pairing of All-Star guards in Murray and Trae Young and placed more heat on McMillan. Despite the addition of another top scorer in Murray, the Hawks struggled near .500 most of the season. They lost four of six games before the All-Star break and were one game under .500 when McMillan was fired.

There was no immediate announcement about Snyder's Atlanta staff. The new coach will have only one day before making his debut with the team in Tuesday night's home game against Washington, so the expectation is Snyder will retain at least most of McMillan's staff which continued to operate under Prunty.

Source: Machado, Padres agree to new $350M, 11-year deal

By BERNIE WILSON
AP SPORTS WRITER

All-Star slugger Manny Machado has agreed to a new $350 million, 11-year contract that will keep him with the San Diego Padres through 2033, according to a person with knowledge of the deal.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because Machado must pass a physical before the deal, which was first reported by ESPN, is finalized.

"We're excited to be here for the rest of our careers and have this hat go into the Hall of Fame," Machado said as he passed a group of reporters before batting second against the Arizona Diamondbacks and going 2 for 3.

Machado, 30, had said that after this season he planned to opt out of the $300 million, 10-year free agent deal he signed in 2019. With the $120 million he already has received, the new deal increases the free-spending Padres' commitment to Machado to $470 million over 15 years.

AP

San Diego Padres' Manny Machado follows through on an RBI-double during the third inning in Game 2 of a baseball NL Division Series against the Los Angeles Dodgers, Oct. 12, 2022, in Los Angeles.

Machado, who has helped turn the Padres into a World Series contender, finished second in the NL MVP race last year. He'll anchor a superstar-laden lineup that includes Xander Bogaerts, Juan Soto and Fernando Tatis Jr., who can return on April 20 from an 80-game suspension for performance-enhancing drugs.

Earlier in spring training, Machado said a deadline for negotiating a new deal had passed, but owner Peter Seidler has said that retaining the smooth-fielding third baseman was his top priority.

Seidler, a member of the O'Malley family that once owned the Dodgers, hasn't been afraid to spend big money in pursuit of the franchise's first World Series title. The Padres haven't been to the Fall Classic since 1998, when they were swept by the New York Yankees.

Hometown product Joe Musgrove was given a $100 million, five-year deal in July. The Padres signed Bogaerts to a $280 million, 11-year contract just after the winter meetings and signed ace Yu Darvish to a new $108 million, six-year deal earlier this month.

With the flashy Tatis sidelined all of last year, first due to injury and then the suspension, Machado was a steadying force in helping lead the Padres on a thrilling run to the NL Championship Series, where they lost in five games to the Philadelphia Phillies. The Padres eliminated the 101-win New York Mets in the wild-card round and then beat the 111-win rival Dodgers in the NL Division Series.

Machado and Bogaerts are under contract through 2033, while Tatis is locked up through 2034 under a $340 million, 14-year deal he signed in early 2021. Soto is under contract for two more seasons.

Machado batted .298 with 32 home runs and 102 RBIs in 2022 and is entering his 12th big league season. He has a career .282 batting average with an .833 OPS, 283 homers and 853 RBIs.

He has also been remarkably durable, playing in all 162 games twice and in fewer than 150 games just once, excluding the pandemic-shortened 2020 season. He was limited to 82 games in 2014, when he didn't make his season debut until May 1 due to knee surgery the previous year, and then had the season cut short by a knee injury in August.

Machado played in 150 games last year. He sustained a scary-looking sprained left ankle on June 19 at Colorado but returned less than two weeks later.

The $350 million deal would be baseball's fourth-largest contract behind Mike Trout ($426.5 million for 12 years), Mookie Betts ($365 million for 12 years) and Aaron Judge ($360 million for nine years).

However, the $31.8 million average will rank just 16th.

MLBPA's Tony Clark says rising payrolls good for game

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (AP)—A handful of free-spending owners in Major League Baseball have made some of the game's other owners a little nervous.

Players' union head Tony Clark doesn't mind that development one bit.

"Baseball is doing very well," Clark said on Saturday as the first full slate of spring training games began in Florida and Arizona.

Clark's perspective isn't shared by all. There's a group of owners—including Pittsburgh's Bob Nutting—who believe that a recent jump in free agent spending is part of the reason smaller market teams, like the Pirates, struggle to remain competitive. It's one of the reasons MLB recently formed an economic reform committee.

"It's the single biggest issue facing the Pittsburgh Pirates," Nutting told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on Friday. "Competitive disparity, revenue disparity and payroll disparity are all real challenges."

This offseason, salaries have risen following last year's agreement on a five-year labor contract with the players' association. Payrolls rose 12.6% to a $4.56 billion last year, breaking the previous record set in 2017, and are set to go even higher this year.

The New York Mets, entering their third season under owner Steve Cohen, project a payroll upwards of about $370 million—which would smash the previous high of $291 million by the 2015 Los Angeles Dodgers.

Some so-called smaller market teams have even joined the spending surge. The San Diego Padres have been very active with free agents over the past few years, adding standouts like shortstop Xander Bogaerts.

Clark said that's evidence that teams from markets of all sizes can compete financially and on the field, noting that the Padres have seen an uptick in fan interest.

"Teams were competing, engaging in the free agent market and created a level of excitement that I would think is a positive," Clark said.

There's no doubt that economic disparity exists in baseball. While the Mets are set to spend around $370 million on payroll, others like the Orioles, Rays, Pirates and Athletics are expected to be in the $60-80 million range.

The causes for that disparity are where friction occurs between MLBPA and MLB.

"The question that should be asked in regards to one team's payroll versus another, is whether or not that team is making a conscious decision to have its payroll there, or whether it has the ability to increase its payroll," Clark said.

"The answer is the latter, not the former."

MINOR LEAGUE UNION

Clark said he remains "optimistic" that ongoing labor negotiations between the MLBPA's minor-league wing and MLB will continue to progress in a positive direction.

More than 5,500 minor league baseball players formed a union in September in an effort to boost annual salaries as low as $10,400. Negotiations began in November to secure the first labor agreement for the minor leagues.

"Has some progress been made? Yes," Clark said. "But there's still tangible work that needs to be done."

Clark said that some of MLB's proposals during the negotiation process have included ways to further contract the minor leagues in exchange for improvements.

Clark said that kind of proposal is a "non-starter."

"The idea of the league having the ability to cut minor league jobs or contract teams further, on the heels of the 40-plus teams contracted a few years ago, is troublesome," Clark said.

MLB ended the Professional Baseball Agreement that governed the relationship between the majors and minors in late 2020, after minor league seasons were canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Affiliates were cut from a minimum of 160 to 120, the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues that had governed the minors since 1901 was shut down and MLB took over operation of the minors.

BROADCAST BLUES

Commissioner Rob Manfred said last week that MLB is prepared for whatever happens to the financially troubled company that owns regional broadcast rights for 14 teams after Diamond Sports Group skipped about $140 million in interest payments.

Diamond is a subsidiary of Sinclair Broadcast Group Inc., and its regional networks broadcasts games of 14 MLB, 16 NBA and 12 NHL teams. Diamond said as of Sept. 30 it had debt of $8.674 billion. It has nearly $1 billion in rights payments, mostly to baseball teams, due in the first quarter this year.

If MLB does take over distribution from Diamond, Manfred said it would not be able to replace 100% of the revenue in the short term.

Clark said the MLBPA has been in touch with Manfred's office about the issue.

"They have an ability to address the (regional sports networks) and have told us they have a plan in place," Clark said. "What we don't know is anything beyond that and how it's going to affect the system.

"That will require a conversation."

Marlins' Sandy Alcantara gets typo-free Cy Young plaque

JUPITER, Fla. (AP)—Miami Marlins ace Sandy Alcantara received his NL Cy Young Award trophy on Sunday for the second time — and this time he has no reason to give it back.

"I want to keep it for the rest of my life," Alcantara said. "I think that is for my mom."

When the Baseball Writers' Association of America originally presented Alcantara with the trophy at its January awards dinner, the plaque dubbed both Alcantara and AL winner Justin Verlander the "most valuble" pitchers in their leagues, leaving out the second "a" in "valuable."

Afterward, the group told him it would provide a new one.

The replacement contains the more up-to-date "most outstanding" phrasing — and it's spelled correctly.

Marlins owner Bruce Sherman presented the award to Alcantara at home plate before Miami's spring training home opener against St. Louis.

As part of the brief ceremony, the Roger Dean Stadium Chevrolet public address announcer proclaimed that Alcantara was "finally" receiving his award.

"I didn't expect that I was going to get my award today," Alcantara said. "I thought I'd go outside and have fun with my teammates. But when I saw the surprise, it made my day today."

Alcantara went 14-9 with a 2.28 ERA in 2022, pitching a league-high 228 2/3 innings. The 27-year-old right-hander expects to contend for the Cy Young again this season.

"Yes, 100%," Alcantara said. "If I'm healthy I can do it again."

NMA concludes 'Talent Identification Camp'

LEIGH GASES

Theodore Rodgers attempts a high jump during the Northern Marianas Athletics "Talent Identification Camp" last Saturday at the Oleai track and field.

LEIGH GASES

Participants of the last day of the Northern Marianas Athletics "Talent Identification Camp" along with NMA developmental officer Elias Rangamar, middle, standing fourth from left, pose for a photo at the Oleai track and field on Saturday.

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Northern Marianas Athletics "Talent Identification Camp" concluded its four-week camp last Saturday morning at a bustling Oleai track and field.

The camp began on Saturday, Feb. 4, with a mid- and -long distance race. Last Feb. 11, the events were sprints/hurdles and last Feb. 18 the events shifted to discus/javelin/hammer/shotput throws. The camp concluded last Saturday with long/high/triple jumps.

NMA developmental officer and coach Elias Rangamar said that the turnout for the camps was average, between 12 to 15 athletes each camp day, but it turned out well because they were able to do one-on-one training.

He said that the camps were designed to scout for "some talents" for the upcoming Micronesian Games in July and the 4th Oceania Cup and Masters Athletics Championships on Saipan in June.

As for the performance of the athletes that participated, he said that a lot of them were beginners. Particularly in the high jump training portion of last Saturday, Rangamar made them do drills that he thought they needed to learn. "A lot of them haven't tried the high jump before, which is what I expected," said Rangamar.

Even with that, Rangamar is upbeat about the athletes' performance and said that "I think there were a few talents that I saw—maybe three or four that can probably make the high jump team."

He said that they also did the triple jump and the long jump, which is a lot easier to pick athletes for than the high jump as it is more technical and the height of the athlete is a factor as well.

With the sprints and distance running discipline, Rangamar said that the turnout was good for that as well.

Athletics team coach Dr. Ron Snyder handled that portion and Rangamar said that with some of the athletes' constant training with the running club Run Saipan or on their own, "they're pretty good."

Rangamar then said that the athletics team trains about twice a week at the track and field and said that they are still open to anyone that wants to try out the different athletics disciplines.

As the days of the competitive season draw closer, Rangamar said that training will be more frequent later on. But for now, he sees the importance of balancing school, work, and training—though "as the season progresses and we get closer to competition, then they're going to have to pick it up."

Rangamar said that they will conduct this training camp and a master's camp as well in the future. "Anyone can participate. It's not only for those who want to compete, but if you want to get healthy and moving, they can try it out," he said.

The camp was conducted by Rangamar, Snyder, along with some members of the NMA national team.

Members of the camp may potentially be selected to join the national program and other camps as NMA prepares for the 2023 season.

LEIGH GASES

Kagman High School student Leon Sablan Dela Cruz took part in the the Northern Marianas Athletics "Talent Identification Camp" and attempted a high jump during their last day of training last Saturday at the Oleai track and field.

BACK

From Page 20

ing last Sunday.

"The weather was nice and sunny with a very nice sea breeze. The track was super nice and in great condition despite the dusty dry weather. The Saipan Mayor's Office groomed the track and made it look pretty and the track and obstacles on the course were touched up by Mr. Ellery Cruz on our skid steer tractor."

He also went on to thank all MRA members who continue to race every month despite the current economic uneasiness.

"Racing isn't cheap yet we find ways to always see each other on the starting line. I also want to thank all the sponsors and supporters who keep the track clean and beautiful. Namely the Department of Public Works, Saipan Mayor's Office, and all the volunteers who go up and maintain the facility and grounds. And personally, I'd like to thank the MRA board, who work together in successfully organizing and working races before, during and after every event. Last but not least, I want to thank my wife, who is not only my biggest supporter, but also our children's biggest supporter. She is also a racer herself."

In the Intermediate Class, Corry Pangelinan, like Alvarez, again won with a perfect 50 points. Aric Cruz was second with 44 points, followed by Henry Camacho Jr. with 40 points.

Vicente Palacios also swept the first two editions of the monthly races—and all four races—after again reigning supreme in the Novice Class.

He had 50 points, followed by Matthew Guerrero with 44 points and Christian Camacho with 40 points.

The results of other divisions in the February edition of the 2023 Monster Energy Point Series Race will be published in the next issues of *Saipan Tribune*.

LAO ZHANG

Shane "Pikaboo" Alvarez leads his dad, Justis "Cuki" Alvarez, in the early stages of the Expert Class of the 2023 Monster Energy Point Series Race last Sunday at the Cowtown Race Track .

CAROL

From Page 20

"If she had played in the Games (both Pacific Games in the Solomon Islands and Micronesian Games in the Marshall Islands) personally I am quite sure we would have won every gold medal…[do you think] she and Colin would lose? If she thinks she will get more wildcards then go for it. Anyway I wish her the best of luck," he said.

Georgia Tech women's tennis coach Rodney Harmon, meanwhile, said Lee has a bright future in the sport of tennis.

"Carol has a very high ceiling as she is very athletic, committed to being the best player she can be, and is a fierce competitor. Her improvement since she came to Georgia Tech has been incredible. She is extremely hardworking and is a joy to coach," he said.

GECKOS

From Page 20

for a tied game.

The Tatagas' Xyriel Pascual then broke the tie in the 16th minute and it was quiet until Mya Abraham tied up the game once again.

Then, when it seemed like the game would end in a stalemate, the Tatagas' Benavente pulled up with a goal in the 34th minute which the Lancherus were not able to tie again, resulting in a win for the Tatagas.

The Tatagas are now tied on top of the standings with Hopwood Middle School at 3 wins and 1 draw each; the Geckos are at 2 wins and 2 draws; Francisco M. Sablan Middle School is still at 1 win and 3 losses; DMS is at 1 win and 3 loss; while the COVMS are at 4 losses.

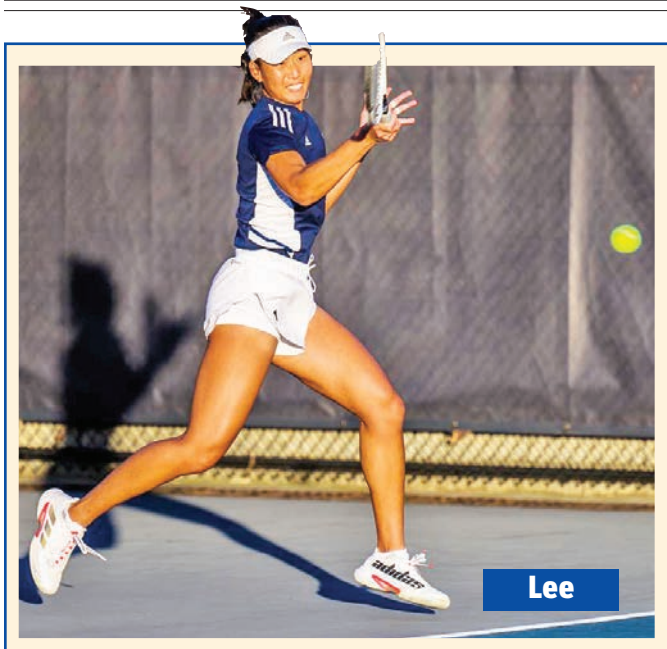
Lillard sets Blazers records with 71 points, 13 3s in win

PAGE 17

Saipan Tribune
Sports

NMA concludes 'Talent Identification Camp'

PAGE 19



Lee

Carol switches tennis allegiance to US

By MARK RABAGO
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ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The CNMI will not be having Carol Lee in this year's Micronesian Games in Majuro and the Pacific Games in Honiara after arguably the best women's tennis player the islands has ever produced opted to switch his tennis allegiance from the CNMI to the U.S.

"My head coach told me that I could get higher potential opportunities to get accepted into wild cards for ITF tournaments if I switched my flag to the U.S.," Lee told *Saipan Tribune* about her decision to switch allegiance to the U.S.

The current No. 7 women's singles player in the Intercollegiate Tennis Association's individual rankings said that she will continue to represent the CNMI in spirit.

"In my heart I'm still representing CNMI and I always will but as of now, with an idea of getting more opportunities for my tennis career in the future, my flag would be the U.S."

Lee said she just wants to maximize her tennis opportunities and believes donning the U.S. flag is the best path for now.

"I still can represent the CNMI and I don't have an official plan of what I would do yet after college, but I would like to try out playing pro. I can switch it back to my [original] flag if it doesn't help me with tennis potential," said the 21-year-old from Georgia Tech.

CNMI national tennis coach Jeff Race laments Lee's decision to switch allegiances, saying that it will deprive the CNMI of an automatic four gold medals in both the Pacific Games and Micronesian Games (gold medal in women's singles, women's doubles, mixed doubles, and women's team).

See CAROL on Page 19

Back-to-back for Cuki in Expert Class

LAO ZHANG
Justis "Cuki" Alvarez in action during the Expert Class of the 2023 Monster Energy Point Series Race last Sunday at the Cowtown Race Track.

By MARK RABAGO
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ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Two monthly races, two wins for Justis "Cuki" Alvarez as the 52-year-old successfully navigated the Cowtown Race Track last Sunday en route to winning the Expert Class of the 2023 Monster Energy Point Series Race.

Alvarez actually finished tied with his son, Shane, as the two totaled 47 points each in the 12-lap race. However, the father beat the offspring in the second heat to take the February race of the Marianas Racing Association. Dave Celis rounded out the Top 3 in the Expert Class with 38 points.

Cuki Alvarez said winning the first two races of the year aboard his spanking new 2023 KX250F proves that veteran riders like him are not exactly over the hill.

"I'm trying to show these young guns that age ain't nothing but a number and to inspire them to keep competing at a high level, even well into their later years in life."

The Trench Tech Racing owner added that topping the January and February editions of the Expert Class makes him a step closer to reclaiming the division's checkered flag.

"That's always the goal, but I am doing it more so to have fun and keep the racing alive and well and competitive at the same time."

He did confide that he'll be traveling later in the year and will miss a few races, "so technically I will not win the series or championship at the end."

The elder Alvarez thanked everyone who made the track conditions very ideal for rac-

See BACK on Page 19

Geckos, Tatagas slip past MS soccer foes

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

The Saipan International School Geckos and Tanapag Middle School Tatagas slipped past their foes in the 2022-2023 NMIFA-PSS Interscholastic Soccer League after winning their games last Thursday at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.

The Geckos had a lopsided win against the DanDan Middle School Tottots, 6-2; while the Tatagas had a tight game against Chacha Ocean View Middle School, 3-2.

In the first game of the afternoon, Beatrice Gross handed the Geckos their first goal in the second minute. Just four minutes later, Gross had a handle of the ball again for an early 2-0 lead.

The Geckos controlled the first half as Aubrey White kicked in two goals of her own in the 10th and 16th minute. Teammate Anne Lee rounded up the Geckos' goals in the 19th and 26th minute, while the Tottots still have not replied.

The Tottots then finally scored in the 34th minute made by Jahsmin Ramon for a 6-1 game. However, it was too little too late for the Tottots as time ran out and Ramon scored their last goal in the 45th minute as the Geckos clinched the W.

In the Tatagas-Lancherus game later, it was an even playing field as they took turns at the goal.

Pualani Dela Cruz of COVMS drew first blood in the 11th minute, but was immediately replied by Hailey Benavente two minutes later

See GECKOS on Page 19

LEIGH GASES
In this file photo, Saipan International School's Beatrice Gross, left, goes up against a Tanapag Middle School player during one of their games in the 2022-2023 NMIFA-PSS Interscholastic Soccer League at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.